A CRITICAL RACE NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF NEW YORK CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF TEACHER CERTIFICATION AND TEACHING QUALITY

by

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ABSTRACT

A CRITICAL RACE NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF NEW YORK CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF TEACHER CERTIFICATION AND TEACHING QUALITY

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Growing national attention to the importance of early childhood education (ECE) has led many cities and states to abandon debates pertaining to whether and for whom Pre-Kindergarten (PK) should be available in favor of the establishment of Universal PK (UPK). UPK programs have been framed as an investment in human capital to improve standards and performance and achieve economic payoffs that will afford high returns on investment—improving future employment, lowering rates of incarceration, etc. Such an investment narrative is predicated on high-quality UPK programs; this has meant that in New York City (NYC), UPK teachers were expected to be certified by New York State.

Situating my study within the growing educational research literature on the problems with teacher certification tests, which found that such tests disadvantage Teachers of Color, this qualitative study employed critical race theory to examine the racialization of teacher certification test success and failure, combining three individual life history interviews, a critical participatory focus group, and dyad. Through interviews, it sought to understand how ECE teachers of Color in NYC conceptualized teaching quality within the context of institutional discourses and official definitions of teaching quality. Employing critical narrative analysis, I attended to the interplay between policy discourses and personal lived experiences via conversational narratives recounting their experiences of licensure test failure, inquiring into how they negotiated institutional

definitions of qualified teacher with their own understandings and lived experiences pertaining to teacher qualification. Focus groups served as sites for the co-creation of counter-narratives to the institutional narrative of teacher licensure indexing teacher quality.

Findings point toward how current policy conceptions of teacher quality as teacher licensure gives continuation to a long history of teacher licensure tests being used as a racist tool to protect whiteness in the teaching profession. This is particularly problematic in light of the growing majority of young children in today's early childhood classrooms combined with the proven benefits children of Color have from having Teachers of Color. As such, implications point toward the need to disentangle conceptualizations of teacher quality and qualification from teacher licensure testing.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to three powerful women who deeply inform my own sense of the power of discourse to shape who and what we choose to be. First, to my maternal grandmother, Juanita Baldwin. She could not even sign her own name, but she raised 10 beautiful children into adulthood and sparked my love for writing, frequently tucking a spiral notepad and pen into my tiny hands from across my earliest memories in childhood. Second, to my mother, Patricia Baldwin Russell. On the surface, we could not be more different and yet, a powerful love and sense of possibility bind us together. Through this, we are learning to respect each other and build a special friendship that is being made richer across time and space.

Finally, to my rural high school Spanish teacher, Lynn Sloan Barnes. Thanks to Mrs. Barnes, I found a deep love of close textual analysis, was fortuitously exposed to the surrealist art of Salvador Dalí and Frida Kahlo—which connected me to a much broader world—and, discovered how to more authentically love myself and others.

I finished this doctoral journey, because I developed strength enough to do it with the help of countless individuals along the way. However, I never could have or would have started it without the powerful influence of these three women on my life and work. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

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I never understood the seeming cheesiness of, "All errors are mine—all the good stuff is everyone else's!" written in most acknowledgements. Until now. Anything you read that is stirring, novel, or smart in this dissertation is because I have been abundantly blessed with amazing students-, peer- and elder-teachers who were patient with me as we co-developed my understandings. And of course, all errors or lapses are mine. I start here by thanking my formal teachers and conclude with everyone else. Thank you for reading.

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Rarely is a dissertation completed without family and friends. As per usual, I have given you short shrift and all the express gratitude to teachers and colleagues in education. That said, *you* are the ones who keep me going, give me perspective, and hold me accountable for the long-term impacts of my investments and actions. I started this dissertation with one family and gained many others along the way. To conclude, just a few shout outs to you.

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To "The Russells," thank you for supporting me all the way to Teachers College, Columbia University! Even though I am a proud Yankee now, you have found your ways to love me anyway. Thank you for getting me here and for your continued prayers and love. Daddy, "it" is finished!! What will we joke about now?

To Harmony Pilobello, you have been a climbing partner, a bridesmaid, and a total enthusiast. You also encouraged me to keep going when I actually wanted to give up. Thank you for refusing to "let me" quit!

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G. R. B.

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INTRODUCTION

Growing national attention to the importance of early childhood education has led many cities and states to abandon debates pertaining to whether and for whom Pre-Kindergarten (PK) should be available in favor of the establishment of Universal PK (UPK) programs. In this study, I am concerned with how policies such as UPK are woven into the important debate regarding early childhood teacher quality and the experiential consequences for teachers of infants to PK, henceforth early childhood education (ECE). Of particular concern are the ways in which ECE and teacher quality are framed from a neo-liberal perspective, spinning "a narrative of 'investment' in 'human capital' to improve 'standards' and 'performance' and achieve 'economic payoffs' that will give high 'returns on investment'" (Dahlberg et al., 2013, p. 7). For early childhood teachers in New York City, this means becoming certified by the New York State Education Department (NYSED).

Problems with teacher certification tests have been identified in educational research, exposing the ways licensure tests disadvantage Teachers of Color; most of this existing research focuses on reporting that tests are racially unjust and offer possible solutions to address the problem in ways that increase the burden of preparation on teachers or their preparation programs (Ellis & Epstein, 2015; Souto-Manning, 2019; Souto-Manning et al., 2020; Tillman, 2004). Within this context, I seek to understand how ECE Teachers of Color construct and deconstruct the process of becoming certified.

Background of the Problem

Early childhood teachers are uniquely positioned to shed light on a shifting policy context defining the terms of their teaching quality as they are caught in the middle of a nationwide debate over the level of qualifications they should obtain in order to be early childhood teachers (Kagan et al., 2008; Zigler et al., 2011). This debate is complicated by small- and large-scale economic factors affecting systems for early care and education. Historically, ECE teachers have been marginalized and underpaid compared to their K-12 teaching peers (Kagan et al., 2008). This problem has been amplified since the UPK expansion.

UPK has become a key policy issue among United States governors, which they have targeted because of its perceived potential economic impact on their states. According to one National Governor's Association policy brief,

> policymakers in many states have acted to dramatically expand children's access to publicly funded pre-K programs for 4-year-olds and have made steady progress in raising standards for program quality. Promising results from Michigan, New Jersey, and other states demonstrate that state investments yield significant early gains in children's academic and social development that last through elementary school. (Lovejoy, 2013, p. 23)

As state policymakers weigh UPK via a cost-benefit analysis, they also analyze the costs, benefits, and affordability of increasing UPK teacher pay as well as how to increase their standards of teacher quality given potential salary increases (Zigler et al., 2011). In the case of New York State's UPK, there is an aggressive effort to match or nearly match UPK teacher salaries to that of K-12 teachers (Bos et al., 2016), which then legitimated the requirement that UPK teachers must hold the same qualifications as K-12 teachers. In New York State, this requirement then embroils early childhood teacher certification policy in a larger conversation about the legitimate use of teacher licensure tests as a measure and/or predictor of teaching quality, especially since tests have been proven to be racist (Ellis & Epstein, 2015; Neal et al., 2015; Souto-Manning et al., 2020; Tillman,

2004) and classist (Hogan, 1996) and, thus, to disproportionately exclude Teachers of Color from the profession (Graham, 2013; Lemberger & Reyes-Carrasquillo, 2011; Souto-Manning, 2019). This concern is even greater due to the fact that recently-introduced New York State certification exams have had staggeringly low passing rates in recent years and have been judged in court to be racially biased (Harris, 2015).

In New York City, UPK teacher qualifications historically have been governed based on the New York City Health Code. Article § 47.13 of the code determines teaching staff qualifications for early childhood education (Article 47, repealed and reenacted in 2008). The Code stipulated that early childhood educators are "certified or qualified" if they meet one of the following conditions: (1) a bachelor's in early childhood and New York State certification; (2) certification from an organization that has reciprocity with New York State; (3) a bachelor's in early childhood education or related field and "five years of supervised experience in a pre-school program *if currently employed in a permitted child care service*" (emphasis added); or (4) if they are eligible, they might create and follow a study plan in order to become qualified according to the first three conditions listed above within a period of seven years. Early childhood teachers are study-plan eligible if they have an associate's degree in ECE, or they have 90 undergraduate college credits or a bachelor's degree plus experience teaching children up to third grade.

The type of ambiguity visible in Article 47 regarding required teacher qualifications (e.g., certified *or* qualified and *if employed in a permitted child care center*) is also somewhat visible in the stricter New York State education law § 3602-e, which regulates funding for UPK statewide and, though it also has a "study plan" provision, ultimately requires UPK teachers to be certified. Given that many career early childhood teachers are not defined as qualified to teach UPK according to the New York State law, and given that early care centers where they work are accepting funds from the state to offer UPK, such teachers are not only caught in the middle of a nationwide debate

over early childhood teacher qualifications, but they are also in a constant state of uncertainty due to the ambiguity of how Article 47 and New York State laws requiring certification for UPK teachers are worded and enforced.

Since §3602-e does not dictate requirements for ECE teachers not working in UPK, Article 47 qualification requirements more often provide guidelines for New York City teachers of younger children not enrolled in UPK. However, the disproportionate funding for UPK compared to funding for early care and education outside of UPK significantly influences teacher salaries in New York City and often persuades ECE teachers to pursue teaching certification to teach in UPK; this is one way to achieve upward mobility in an often and otherwise stagnant profession (Kagan et al., 2008). Further, New York State UPK, under §3602-e, is positioned as part of a public school, PK-12 continuum with similar perks, such as 180 days of full-day instruction (as opposed to 12 months) and similar teaching staff qualifications, which are, under the law, governed by the State University of New York Board of Regents, exactly as K-12 teacher qualifications are governed by that ruling body.

UPK is positioned as an alluring, "high-status" alternative to teaching ages zero to four in non-UPK settings. Becoming certified in New York State means that ECE teachers must not only complete teacher education coursework but must also pass licensure exams proven to disproportionately fail racially, ethnically, and/or linguistically minoritized teachers (Baker-Doyle & Petchauer, 2015; Ellis & Epstein, 2015; Graham, 2013; *Gulino v. Board of Educ*., 2015; Neal et al., 2015; Souto-Manning, 2019), being likely to disproportionately impact early childhood Teachers of Color. To be sure, even as demand for early care and education increases, many experienced early childhood Teachers of Color in New York City are not benefitting from the growing demand for teachers, because they are not yet certified, often because they have not passed requisite exams for teacher certification (Souto-Manning, 2019; Souto-Manning et al., 2020).

The potential displacement of experienced early childhood Teachers of Color in light of UPK expansions and associated test requirements for certification requires particular attention. Whereas previously early childhood teachers did not need state certification to teach up to PK in New York State, since 2014, either certification or a strict study plan leading to certification is required to teach UPK. This is deemed to ensure quality. Policies affirm the belief that certified UPK teachers produce better outcomes for young children. Thus, as is often the case in policy rhetoric about school, and especially ECE, students and their teachers are treated as economic investments, wherein early childhood teachers with years of experience and degrees in ECE are deemed unworthy of investment if they are not certified. Testing then serves as a guise of neutrality or objectivism.

Multiple studies (Baker-Doyle & Petchauer, 2015; Graham, 2013; Souto-Manning, 2019; Tillman, 2004) and court cases (Ellis & Epstein, 2015; *Gulino v. Board of Educ*., 2015) have found that tests are racist and/or culturally and linguistically biased, and therefore the harm that such tests do to the demographic landscape of the teaching workforce needs attention. Furthermore, research shows that such tests have low predictive validity for how teacher licensure candidates will influence student achievement outcomes (Hill et al., 2012; Legeros, 2013). This is particularly true for African American students who perform better on standardized exams when their teachers are African American, regardless of their teachers' performance on professional licensure exams and whether or not they are certified (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010).

Teacher licensure testing has been found to perpetuate inequitable systems that disadvantage students of Color because they limit the diversity of the teaching force through gatekeeping exams (Neal et al., 2015). It is within the context of New York City, which has historically boasted large numbers of early childhood Teachers of Color when compared with the national racial demographics of Teachers of Color (Ochshorn &

Garcia, 2007), that I seek to inquire into the use of certification testing for early childhood teachers.

Research that challenges the use of tests to represent teacher quality is extensive. This work ranges from quantitative reviews of data sets (Legeros, 2013) to intimate studies of teachers as they navigate teacher certification and the required tests compared with classroom observation data (Lemberger & Reyes-Carrasquillo, 2011). Throughout the research literature, it is clear that standardized assessments are not a strong predictor of teacher quality (Henry et al., 2013) and effectiveness (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010), but they continue to be used as a gatekeeper and barrier to entry, most often negatively impacting Teachers of Color.

In his quantitative study of all fourth-grade teachers certified in one year in Massachusetts, Legeros (2013) challenged the idea that teacher tests, if they must exist, need to have high "cut scores" in order to produce positive effects for children. Using quantitative analyses, Legeros compared the test scores of students taught by teachers who passed the Massachusetts state licensure test based on raised minimum scores to those of students taught by teachers who were licensed under Massachusetts's emergency safety nets created after higher minimum scores were established. He found that modest reductions in minimum cut off scores on licensure tests most often positively affected pass rates among Teachers of Color but had no negative correlation to student outcomes on achievement tests, highlighting that cut off scores are excessively high.

Perhaps most compelling are the findings of Goldhaber and Hansen (2010), because their work challenges the very notion that test scores are the best way to determine teacher readiness to teach students of Color. The authors found that, even when using the dubious corollary of student test score data (Leonardo & Grubb, 2013), teacher outcomes on student achievement have different predictive validity depending on a teacher's racial match with students. According to the study, Black students in

particular have better outcomes when working with Black teachers, regardless of teacher licensure test scores.

A more recent longitudinal study set in North Carolina (Lindsay & Hart, 2017) documented similar findings in terms of disciplinary outcomes for Black students. Looking at administrative referrals for discipline, these authors found that across age groups, family income variations, and genders, Black students had fewer disciplinary referrals, particularly for defiance-based referrals, when students were taught by same-race teachers. Further, in their large-scale longitudinal study, Gershenson and colleagues (2017) found academic benefits for Black students who had even one Black teacher in their elementary school years; having one Black teacher led students to have significant higher rates of high school graduation, for example.

Given that licensure tests have not been proven to represent teacher quality, it is alarming that "highly qualified teacher" is still frequently used interchangeably with "certified teacher" and that certification hinges on tests and test scores. Such narrow definitions of teacher quality do not account for the growing majority of students of Color in U.S. schools nor the benefits students of color reap from being taught by Teachers of Color (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). As Barnum (2017) denounced, "Certification rules and tests are keeping would-be Teachers of Color out of America's classrooms" (para. 1).

Statement of the Problem

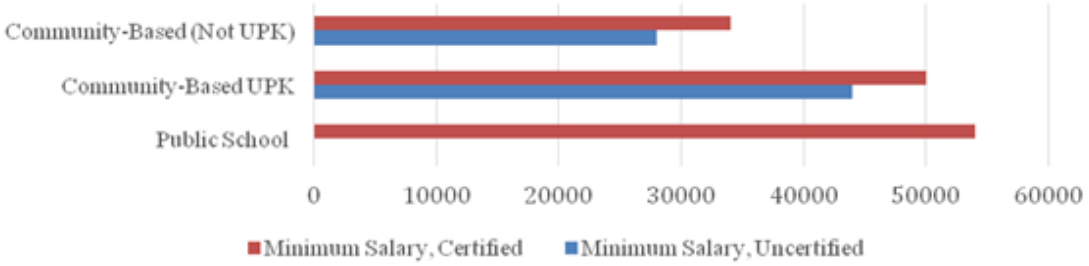
Historically, teacher certification tests were borne out of a desire to keep Black teachers away from White schools post-*Brown v. Board of Education* (Tillman, 2004). As such, teacher certification exams, like the National Teacher Examination (NTE), have long served as a tool for the displacement of Black teachers post-*Brown*. In light of this history, given emerging certification requirements for early childhood teachers, this

problem is newly relevant to the field of ECE, where teacher demographics reflect the highest percentages of Teachers of Color.

According to a survey of New York City teachers, 60% of public school-based early childhood teachers in New York City were White, non-Hispanic, and 35% of community-based teachers were White, non-Hispanic (Ochshorn & Garcia, 2007). Further, the percentage of teachers in public school-based settings was smaller than or the same as the number of teachers in community-based, or NYCEEC settings. For example, the percentage of Latinx teachers working in NYCEEs was 42% compared to 13% in public school-based settings. Twenty-nine percent of teachers in community-based settings were Black, while only 16% of public school-based teachers were Black. Since most community-based center teachers were not required to be certified in order to teach, but UPK teachers teaching in community-based settings must be certified or on a study plan to become certified under New York State Law §3602-3, this racial disparity begins to shed light on the inequities reflected in teacher certification. These inequities are not simply symbolic: they have material effects on teachers' salaries, determined by whether they teach in NYCEECs, UPK, as provided in those settings, or public-school settings.

Figure 1.1, based on data from the American Institutes for Research (Bos et al., 2016), represents salary differentials after New York City's UPK expansion among public school teachers, community-based teachers providing UPK in those settings, and community-based teachers not teaching UPK. According to Kaplan and Mead (2017), as of 2014, New York State teachers with a bachelor's degrees in community-based centers earned a starting salary of $36,000 while starting salaries for public school teachers was nearly $50,000.

Figure 1.1. *NYC Public School, CBO UPK, and CBO (Not UPK) Salary Differentials*



The misperception that quality PK-12 teachers pass certification tests has been addressed in the literature in California (Ellis & Epstein, 2015), Massachusetts (Legeros, 2013), Kentucky (Nnazor et al., 2004), and North Carolina (Graham, 2013), but the existing research has limitations. Among these studies, we see disparate attempts to address how racially, ethnically, and linguistically minoritized teachers succeed, despite obstacles, on teacher licensure tests compared to their mostly White middle-class peers (Ellis & Epstein, 2015; Nnazor et al., 2004). Nevertheless, most of the literature fails to provide first-hand empirical accounts of the ways in which striving to pass exams impacts teachers, thus offering a romanticized narrative where intersectionally minoritized (Souto-Manning, 2018) teachers ultimately prevail despite the odds. One exception is the qualitative study Souto-Manning (2019) conducted with ten Teachers of Color. She specifically sought to learn from the experiences of Teachers of Color navigating the edTPA; findings reported that early childhood Teachers of Color (teaching toddlers to second grade) experienced professional demotion, mental health issues (including anxiety), financial hardships, moves to other states that did not require edTPA for licensure, and overall negative effects of the edTPA. In doing so, she uncovered structural obstacles faced by Teachers of Color in light of required licensure testing.

According to Leonardo (2012), education reforms such as *No Child Left Behind* obscure "the structural obstacles that children of color and their families face, such as health disparities, labor market discrimination, and the like, processes that a class

analysis alone cannot unmask" (p. 262). In the area of teacher licensure testing, much more work is needed to understand how structural discrimination also impacts Teachers of Color as they seek to pass licensure exams to become certified. Without this important research, Teachers of Color are likely to continue to blame themselves for not passing certification tests, continuing to frame such problems as an individual rather than a systemic problem (Ladson-Billings, 2016).

Furthermore, raised barriers to entry to early childhood teaching continue to proliferate despite the large-scale consequences for teachers and the workforce, resulting in fewer Teachers of Color and multilingual teachers in ECE classrooms. As Neal et al. (2015) suggest, and other research has proven (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Lindsay & Hart, 2017), this undermines the quality of educational experience of learning for many minoritized students, particularly students of Color (Easton-Brooks, 2019). Neal et al. (2015) write that "colorblind conceptions of quality teaching, by failing to account for ways race matters in education, support the continued production of an overwhelmingly White teaching force that is ill-prepared for racially-diverse students" (p. 6). If research shows no strong connection between credentialing and student achievement in PK-12, and their findings suggest that teaching quality improvements must ensure recruitment and retention of more Teachers of Color (Neal et al., 2015; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007; Willer et al., 2011), then more research is needed to account for teacher testing as problematic in its discursive claims that tests accurately predict teacher quality. It effectively serves to push Teachers of Color out of or to the margins of the profession while not having a proven link to quality and student learning.

The complexities of early childhood teacher certification among racially, ethnically, and minoritized teachers is a problem that is not well explored or understood, either in how it impacts teachers who fail exams or how it functions discursively to misrepresent early childhood teacher quality. Therefore, in this study, I sought to learn from the experiences of teachers with a range of experiences with certification tests. I

recruited participants who were successfully navigating this process, though with some difficulty, as well as participants who were still in that process. Teachers recruited for this study included those who had met requirements for at least one test and teachers who had met requirements for all but one of the tests at the time this study took place. This allowed for a better understanding of the complexity of experiences of teachers who were not yet certified, particularly because they had a range of experiences to share.

In interviews and focus groups, while I sought to elicit responses from ECE Teachers of Color in order to learn how their experiences had been constructed, I engaged in interviewing teachers employing a critical race theory (CRT) framework to elicit counter-narratives. As will be discussed, CRT emanated from critical legal studies as a way to center race and racism in analysis of legal jurisprudence and policies (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) that perpetuate misguided master-narratives and perpetrate material effects that are particularly harmful to People of Color. Thus, employing critical narrative analysis (CNA)—the analysis of co-created conversational narratives (Ochs & Capps, 2001) with critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010)—from a CRT lens, I account for how early childhood teachers construct and negotiate their definition of teaching quality within the context of official definitions of teaching quality that often deem them as failures.

Drawing on CNA, I sought to encourage teachers' critical meta-awareness (Souto-Manning, 2014), so that through exploring the complexities of their own experiences, the interviews established a context in which ECE Teachers of Color re-authored (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016) narratives, interrupting and moving away from re-presentations of their failures in deficit terms and coming to understand test failure as a systemic rather than an individual issue. Building on existing work to draw out new particularities, my study offers insights to inform theory, practice, and policy for future directions in defining quality early childhood teachers.

Rationale

The teaching profession is overwhelmingly White. While still predominantly White, early childhood teaching has a higher percentage of Teachers of Color than any other field. Nevertheless, whereas the K-12 percentage of Teachers of Color is rising, the percentage of ECE Teachers of Color is diminishing (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). This may be understood as resulting from institutional discourses of teacher quality that center teacher licensure and associated testing requirements. After all, teaching has been shown to serve as a tool to exclude Teachers of Color from the profession (e.g., Tillman, 2004). Nevertheless, in early childhood education, there have been a number of studies bringing into question this institutional definition of teacher quality.

For example, in one meta-analysis of seven studies of teacher quality factors and outcomes for early childhood students, Early et al. (2007) found that teacher characteristics, such as two- and four-year bachelor's degrees had little or no impact on student test score data. Palardy and Rumberger (2008) obtained similar results from a study of first grade teacher characteristics and their impact on student achievement as measured by student test score data. Based on this evidence, it remains unproven that teacher certification, particularly as measured by standardized tests, produces better outcomes for students in the early childhood setting. Fuller (2011) goes even farther, emphasizing that the ability to care is the most important characteristic in defining early childhood teacher quality today, but again the ability to care cannot be measured with standardized achievement test data. These studies point toward the need to question whether standardized tests accurately assess the most important roles early childhood teachers play in the lives of children.

Despite lack of conclusive evidence that certification tests result in better teachers, ECE teachers in New York City, many of whom are Teachers of Color and multilingual teachers, must be certified to earn higher wages; successfully passing or not

passing exams has tremendous consequences for ECE teachers, and barriers to entry do not stop at certification exams. In addition to completing a bachelor's or master's in an approved education program that includes specific course and grade requirements in order for teachers to be recommended for certification by their pre-service programs, and passing a battery of tests, ECE teachers in New York State must meet additional undergraduate liberal arts requirements to become certified (Certification from Start to Finish, 2017). This means that even after completing exams, some teachers will have applications for certification rejected due to "unmet" requirements (Appendix A). In cases where teachers did not take certain required college coursework or they earned below the minimum grade point average requirement, in order to be certified, they have to take college-level proficiency exams, such as the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) offered by the College Board. Table 1.1 below summarizes some such liberal arts requirements for ECE certification, other education and certification requirements, and the time commitments, minimum grades, and costs of certification exams. Significantly, Ellis and Epstein (2015) demonstrate the specific challenges to certification for Teachers of Color, highlighting that because many teacher licensure candidates of Color are poor due to intersectional injustices (Crenshaw, 1991), they have to work while they are in school, exasperating prohibitive barriers to requirement completion.

Table 1.1. *New York State Teacher Certification Requirements for Early Childhood*

Education Requirements	**Semester Hours**	**Minimum Grades**
Approved Program in Early Childhood (Bachelor or Master's)	120	2.75 GPA
College Coursework: English Language Arts	6	3.0 GPA
College Coursework: Concepts in Historical & Social Sciences	6	3.0 GPA
College Coursework: Scientific Processes	6	3.0 GPA
College Coursework: Mathematical Processes	6	3.0 GPA

Table 1.1 (continued)

New York State Teacher Certification Exams	Length (minutes)	Price
Educating All Students	180	$92
Content Specialty Test 211 – English Language Arts	120	$65
Content Specialty Test 212 – Math	150	$65
Content Specialty Test 245 – Arts & Sciences	60	$49
edTPA	Not Timed	$300

Whereas the NYS requirements offer some flexibility for requirement completion in approved teacher education programs, individual pathways are marked by more rigidity, disproportionately disadvantaging Teachers of Color, many who are of low-income backgrounds (Coates, 2017). As such, they are less likely to be enrolled in an approved teacher preparation program, which is typically full-time and during the day. As such, ECE teachers who need to work during the day and become certified via part-time evening programs are likely excluded from such programs. Therefore, most working-class potential teacher candidates, many of whom, because of the centrality of race and racism, are people of Color, are relegated to fewer choices for earning their teaching credential. Additionally, these same teachers have less time and/or money to prepare for exams. Thus, tests for teacher licensure, in addition to failing to predict teacher quality, tell us much more about teachers' income and socioeconomic realities (Baker-Doyle & Petchauer, 2015; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977/1990; Graham, 2013; Hogan, 1996) than about their so-called quality.

As such, the rationale for this study is rooted in the understanding that tying teacher quality to certification institutionalizes an intersectional system of injustice, leading to ECE Teachers of Color disproportionately lacking certification and, thus, stagnating upward mobility in the profession for Teachers of Color and for women of Color seeking certification in ECE. The problem is especially perplexing, given a recent decline in Teachers of Color in ECE in particular (Kagan et al., 2008; Willer et al., 2011).

Thus, while there is a body of research related to the problem of teacher certification testing, my research study specifically examined implications of certification requirements for ECE Teachers of Color in light of UPK in NYC.

Theoretical Framework

Heeding Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), who called for using critical race theory (CRT) in education studies as a way to account for the ways in which race and racism disadvantage students of Color, I employed CRT as theoretical framework. CRT emerged from critical legal scholarship developed as more legal scholars, particularly African American legal scholars, noted how the existing scholarship failed to account for the particular ways in which African Americans (and later, other racially and ethnically minoritized groups as well) experienced society as unjust (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Within a context marked by racial inequities, CRT afforded the central positioning of race and racism in my study. CRT is grounded in several tenets: the centrality of race and racism, prioritizing racism over other forms of bigotry in social analysis; a rejection of meritocracy and equal protection under the law; holding in high esteem experiential knowledge, which includes personal experience narratives resisting meta-narratives that reproduce meritocratic assumptions about society and culture; an emphasis on the "ordinariness" of racism; interdisciplinary scholarship; and a commitment to justice-seeking practices that transform social status quos.

Dixson and Rousseau (2005) called for education research to employ all of the tenets via more robust theoretical models that went beyond telling stories of people of Color and to subject narratives "to deeper analysis using the CRT lens" (p. 13). My use of CNA (Souto-Manning, 2014) responded to their call to deeper analysis while retaining the integrity of the CRT tenets. Another area of concern raised by Dixson and Rousseau

(2005) was the ways in which CRT scholarship in education had overlooked a commitment to justice: “CRT mandates that social activism be a part of any CRT project” (p. 13); and therefore, it is important that research and analysis move toward action and creation of anti-racist change.

In order to draw from the existing literature, situated mostly in terms of CRT in education, I centered participants’ counter storytelling and engaged CNA (Souto-Manning, 2014) to analyze teachers’ narratives of their certification and/or test preparation. Crucial at this stage was teachers’ naming what they consider to be critical in their process of becoming certified. According to Souto-Manning (2014), it is impossible to create valid critical research unless the large structural elements addressed within a critical framework are weighed alongside participants’ expressions of their lived experience and what is critical to them. Souto-Manning emphasizes that researchers often operate under the assumption that “what is critical to the researcher is also critical to study participants” (p. 160). If we use established and monolithic assumptions of what is “critical,” we are undermining “the very notion of critical research” (p. 160). Such identifications of what is critical have the potential to help teachers deepen their critique of teacher testing and redefine teacher quality.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

This study sought to understand how early childhood Teachers of Color construct teaching quality in light of institutional discourses that define teaching quality as teacher certification. Further, it sought to understand how ECE Teachers of Color narrate and/or counter-narrate their experiences of certification testing. The following questions guided my study:

1. How do intersectionally minoritized ECE teachers who have experienced licensure test failure in New York State (NYS) define professional achievement in early childhood education?
    a. How do these teachers negotiate official definitions of qualified teacher under Article 47 of the New York City Health Code and NYS's UPK legislation with their own understandings of what makes them qualified?
    b. How do these teachers respond to claims that they are not qualified because of licensure test failure?
2. How do intersectionally minoritized ECE teachers who have experienced licensure test failure in NYS construct and/or co-construct knowledge about the problem of teacher licensure test failure?
    a. What do these teachers see and experience as the local consequences of teacher licensure and testing policies in NYS?
    b. What solutions do these teachers collectively identify as important to solving problems with teacher licensure test failure on exams?
    c. How do these teachers construct and/or narrate their journeys experiencing failure and success?

Definition of Terms

In this study, I take the position that teacher licensure test failure reflects a testing problem, not a teacher qualification problem. Due to the ways in which uncertified early childhood teachers have been positioned, I am careful not to reproduce a narrative that they are not qualified. Such a narrative can be perpetuated in labels such as "uncertified." Therefore, I avoid such deficit labeling. Also, I use bias-free language, aiming to be specific in describing People Color; for purposes of this research study,

- *Teacher* applies to anyone who has the occupation of teaching, even if they are not certified.
- *Teacher assistant* is used to describe those whose occupation is to serve as a classroom teacher assistant.
- *Early childhood professional* is used to describe both teachers and teacher assistants who are actively seeking licensure but not certified to teach.
- *Certified teacher* is used to distinguish certified from uncertified teaching professionals PK-12 only when such distinctions are necessary.
- *Intersectionally minoritized teacher* (Souto-Manning, 2018), is used to describe Teachers of Color who have other interlocking forms of oppression in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship status, and etc.
- *Of Color (Teachers, women, students, etc.*) is used to refer to racially minoritized people and groups from the global majority (Croft et al., 2015).
- *Multicultural* is used to represent multiple diversities in terms of race and ethnicity, language, nationality, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, and etc. For example, one ECE center referred to in this study is directed by an African Muslim woman who wears hijab and co-directed by a Queer White man from the U.S. South, is multicultural. This is not used as proxy for race or ethnicity.
- *Interracial* is used to refer to two or more people of different races.
- *Interethnic* is used to refer to two or more people of different ethnicities.

Significance of Study

Challenging majoritarian notions of teacher quality based on the standardization movement, with roots in efficiency and managerial models of education (Leonardo & Grubb, 2013) while upholding racial (Ellis & Epstein, 2015; Graham, 2013) and

socioeconomic privileges (see Hogan, 1996), this research study importantly offers counter-hegemonic definitions of teaching quality centering the experiences, values, and voices of Teachers of Color. To accomplish this goal, this study sought to better understand how ECE Teachers of Color made sense of and problematized (Freire, 1970/1993) their licensing testing and certification experiences and to learn how they defined teaching quality within and despite their standards-based contexts.

To date, the focus in teacher education is on the majority White demographic represented in the U.S. teaching workforce (Haddix, 2010). According to Cheruvu (2014) and Haddix (2008a), most research in teacher education has assumed that teachers are White and monolingual, so there is a lack of research on the preparation of racially and linguistically minoritized teachers (Durán, 2013; Haddix, 2010; Kohli, 2012; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). Both Cheruvu and Haddix focus on teacher preparation programming, but their work can and should be extended into questions about teacher licensure tests and certification preparation. This study joins a growing body of research that centers the voices of Teachers of Color through empirical studies (Bennett et al., 2006; Graham, 2013; Petchauer, 2014; Watanabe, 2008). In addition to adding to this body of research, my study significantly undertook a CRT perspective entailing a justice component. Further, research on early childhood teacher certification and licensure testing addressing the justice-seeking imperative of CRT and highlighting and exploring participants' experiences of this problem is extremely limited and recent (e.g., Souto-Manning, 2019; Souto-Manning et al., 2020). Building on Souto-Manning (2019), my research study engaged participants in narration, counter-narration, and critical analysis of their lived experiences conveyed via conversational narratives. Thus, this study uniquely and importantly examined the racist and structural inequalities that produce teacher licensure test failure (Leonardo & Grubb, 2013).

Analyzing institutional discourses and personal narratives pertaining to teacher licensure tests through the lens of CRT with an emphasis on income and race as

intersectional systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991; Milner, 2013; Souto-Manning, 2018) afforded an understanding that certification test performance has nothing or little to do with teachers' quality and potential. Additionally, it helped unveil their role in the (re)production of inequities via material consequences related to those who passed or failed tests as well as for the growing majority of young children of color in today's early childhood classrooms. Further, it explored how early childhood teachers (re)defined teaching quality from their perspectives, voices, and stories, often positioned marginally in majoritarian conceptualizations of teacher quality. As early childhood teachers' experiences have not been addressed in the research from such a perspective, this study's findings importantly contribute the context of their community-based and community-driven notions and definitions of quality in teaching and teacher preparation. As such, this study offers important contributions to the reconceptualization of ECE teaching quality (Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018) by drawing attention to ECE Teachers of Color's definitions of teaching quality and their exploration of their own experiences with certification tests.

Further, through the use of teachers' counter-narratives on what they consider critical (Souto-Manning, 2014), the study also presents data on the ways that teachers think about and are impacted by certification exams. Consistent with the research literature, pilot study data indicated that early childhood teachers are most frustrated by how hard they study, how much money they spend to prepare for and retake exams, and how their careers and compensation are harmed because they are not certified. This study expands on prior research and my pilot studies, unveiling the extent of the harm caused by whiteness in teacher certification and addresses the important ways teachers construct the problem of teacher certification, both individually and in a focus group setting. Implications point toward the need to disentangle teacher quality from teacher certification and teacher certification from testing if we are to meet the need to recruit and retain ECE Teachers of Color. This is particularly significant because a coherent

narrative on the value of teacher testing has been normalized for too long, adorned by a white veil of claimed test objectivity (Leonardo & Grubb, 2013), even as these exams are known to be a poor predictor of teacher quality. As such, by centering the experiences of ECE Teachers of Color, this study contributes to new understandings of teacher licensure testing, which can influence policy changes.

In the meantime, by highlighting what participants deem critical to their experiences of certification and testing, this research offers important contributions to how early childhood teacher educators might best support Teachers of Color in pursuing teacher certification while resisting romanticized narratives of test preparation and achievement that often lead to a focus on remediating rather than supporting intersectionally minoritized teachers through these experiences. Keeping an important emphasis on experiential knowledge and seeking to challenge injustice, findings from this study offer an alternative to solutions-based research, shedding light on the need to support ECE Teachers of Color in examining their own experiences and offering an understanding of how the use of remediation-type test preparation misrepresents test failure as an individual rather than systemic issue.

Positionality

As a middle-class White woman and former high school English teacher from the rural Appalachian foothills who saw assimilation to dominant English as a path to my own upward mobility, I recognize my many privileges. For example, Whites' encounters with financial hardships are less devastating than African Americans' due to a long history of racism in the U.S. (Coates, 2017). While acknowledging my racial privilege, I also embrace my responsibility to engage in research that is anti-racist from a White abolitionist perspective (Love, 2019; Nayak, 2007; Roth-Gordon, 2003). Thus, my positionality as a researcher is framed by critical whiteness studies (Nayak, 2007) and

whiteness studies (Leonardo, 2002). In Chapter III, I explain how I accounted for my whiteness and its impact on my analysis. A minor note: I capitalize *White* only when I am referring to individuals. I do not capitalize whiteness and other derivatives of the word in order both to be answerable to the unearned privilege of White identity and to avoid reinforcement of power dynamics through conventions of capitalization (Gotanda, 1991).

I was drawn to this study in particular, because of my experience as a teacher certification test preparation consultant for the New York City PreK Test Preparation Program. On the first day of our workshops, I witnessed systematic racial injustices; the overwhelming majority of 60 teachers who attended the workshop were Teachers of Color. This stood in stark contrast to the New York City ECE teaching force. Standing in front of a group of 60 teachers, I could see the mismatch between the racial demographics of ECE teachers in this remedial certification test preparation workshop and the predominantly White ECE teaching force. As will be seen in Chapters VI and VII, this positionality affected teachers' positioning of me as both someone with power to impact positive change and someone who also represents New York State and its requirements to them.

As I became familiar with these Women of Color teachers during the weeks, months, and sometimes years of test preparation, the stories of their economic hardships, as well as perpetual professional marginalization due to their not being certified, educated me about the multiple racist causes and effects of test failure requiring deeper study. This resonated with the processes whereby Black teachers had been displaced from the profession post-*Brown v. Board of Education* (Tillman, 2004). Because White people like me called for, developed, and enforced such racist tools for exclusion, I saw it as my work to interrupt the stronghold of teacher certification tests as tools for racialized exclusion. To be sure, while I advocate for centralizing researchers of Color in this line of research, I do not adhere to an ideology that implies the responsibility for this work should fall exclusively on their shoulders.

Summary

In this chapter, I showed how teacher certification examinations have historically been used as tools for racism, segregation, and exclusion and discussed how they protect longstanding structural features of racism. I briefly explained how, using a CRT framework and CNA as methodology, this study examined how ECE Teachers of Color constructed and deconstructed narratives about their certification testing experiences. As such, learning from the lived experiences and narratives of ECE Teachers of Color who failed certification tests, my research findings reject white supremacist notions of standardized tests as objective and fair. It offers important implications for anti-racist policies to be developed and enacted pertaining to teacher quality and teacher certification. In the next chapter, I review the literature and introduce pilot work that informed my study.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

As discussed in Chapter I, there is an acute need to increase the diversity of the early childhood education (ECE) force (Cheruvu, 2014; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016, Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018; Souto-Manning et al., 2020), particularly in the face of increasing certification standards, such as exclusionary high stakes assessments, and a historical backdrop in which African American teachers were pushed out of the profession through racist retaliation following the *Brown* decision (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Tillman, 2004). It is well-established that high stakes multiple choice tests do not predict teacher quality (Hill et al., 2012; Legeros, 2013), and yet they have become an increasingly important requirement for teachers in all 50 states while serving a strategic purpose in excluding African American teachers from the profession following desegregation (Tillman, 2004). Moreover, in recent years, edTPA, an exam with known failures in reliability (Gitomer et al., 2019), which also rewards the performance of white teaching (Souto-Manning, 2019), has become a popular addition to or replacement for multiple choice teacher certification testing across states.

In this chapter, I lay out the harmful effects of branding Teachers of Color as insufficient due to certification test scores, and I argue for counter-narratives of teaching quality as an important line of research in reframing the debate about teacher qualification. Moreover, I locate this research within the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and critical whiteness, illustrating how whiteness discourses

exist everywhere in the systems and structures that teachers navigate en route to certification, and thus the intercentricity of racism and whiteness. Finally, I examine the particular instantiation of racism and whiteness in the certification experiences of early childhood Teachers of Color and offer a brief rationale for why it should be studied in the context of New York City's early childhood teaching context.

Racism and Critical Whiteness

Black, African American, Latinx, South Asian, and other early childhood Teachers of Color are disproportionately uncertified, because certification tests, as part of a system of endemic racism, privilege Eurocentric knowledge and ways of knowing and being, or, in other words, such tests position whiteness as the norm (Souto-Manning, 2019). Therefore, the challenges these teachers face are situated within a broader socio-historical context of systemic racism that is often cloaked in whiteness discourses, such as discourses about teaching quality, especially in early childhood education (Souto-Manning, 2019; Souto-Manning et al., 2020). In this section, I examine how racism has been made endemic to society; and, as a White researcher, I explore the importance of critical whiteness to understanding racism, especially in the U.S.

Legal Context

As early as 1980, critical race theory (CRT) legal scholar, Derrick Bell, had brilliantly dissected the arguments of *Brown vs Board of Education*, highlighting that interest convergence had motivated the decision (Bell, 1980). Specifically, rather than the just cause of seeking equality for Black students in education, the conclusions of *Brown* were convenient within a framework of U.S. geopolitical goals. According to an amicus brief filed for *Brown*, as the U.S. was facing the spread of communism by Soviet power, the U.S. needed to look equitable to the rest of the world: "The United States is trying to

prove to the people of the world, of every nationality, race and color, that a free democracy is the most civilized and secure form of government yet devised by man" (as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2004, p. 4). Thus, in his theory of interest convergence, Bell (1980) emphasized the precariousness of Black rights as "expendable…. For throughout United States history … the rights of blacks have regularly been sacrificed to preserve the greater interest of the whole society" (Guinier, 2004, p. 94).

Rather than solving racism in the U.S., *Brown* served to further entrench it. Of particular concern here are the critiques of the colorblind principle that the decision established in jurisprudence (Guinier, 2004). Conservative judges later appointed by Nixon twisted the ruling, which allowed them to malign government race-conscious decision-making as equivalent "with the evils of de jure segregation" (Guinier, 2004, p. 93). Moreover, in 1984, the conservative legal scholar William Bradford Reynolds decried movement-oriented court cases in what he saw, consistent with white liberal arguments more generally, as the erosion of individual rights in favor of so-called group rights. In examining the arguments for legal cases such as *Brown vs. Board of Education*, Reynolds's argument rests on the assumption that equality is possible through colorblind interpretations, because he, like so many White legal scholars, fail to name the racism inherent in the constitution (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) as constitutive in legal deliberations. Reynolds identifies the erosion of individual rights since the 1950s and early 1960s, but he mistakenly puts trust in the law itself. The notion that the U.S. is a merit-based society where people of all races and ethnicities can achieve the same goals rests on this mistaken understanding of the foundational structures that center whiteness in the U.S. Reynolds's liberal prism for interpreting the law is illustrative of "racism without racists" (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Bonilla-Silva forwards a complex analysis of individual responsibility for racism in light of structures and systems—such as the legal basis on which all kinds of advantages to Whites are based. Issues addressed in this

dissertation demand a race- and color-conscious lens, inclusive of critical whiteness, to effectively critique racist systems and structures.

While jurisprudence of the 1950s and early 1960s purported its interpretation to be in favor of individual rights and so-called colorblind conceptions of race, a colorblind approach to interpreting the law allowed for attention to only the most egregious forms of racism. Therefore, critical theories and research are necessary to further interrogate how racism as ordinary (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) impacts a wide array of disproportionate material outcomes based on race. Later in this chapter, I will discuss CRT in detail, but at the outset of this chapter, racism as an ordinary and everyday part of life—and ordinary racism's entanglement with whiteness—is central to my framing here.

Racism Is Endemic

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) discuss the importance of CRT's revisionist histories, which often do address the material effects of structural racism. An important component of revisionist history, one adopted here, is the use of counter-narratives as told from the perspective of Teachers of Color seeking certification. Milner and Howard (2013) call for significant investment in the production of counter-narratives that center the contribution of Teachers of Color to the field of education as replacements for the insufficiency or deficit narratives that are common in teacher education. Of particular interest in this study are characteristics of "ideal teachers" recruited to the field and a deemphasis on certification tests.

Souto-Manning (2019) directly addresses how racism is endemic within the narrative of "good teaching" in early childhood education. Using a critical narrative analysis (CNA) methodology, she disrupts "commonplace discourses of 'good teaching' and 'good teachers,'" (p. 4) in the specific case of the edTPA to show both how whiteness is encoded into the edTPA evaluation and the harmful effects of this racism on Teachers of Color. She dispels the myth that edTPA evaluations are neutral and locates

the assessment within a larger education reform movement that is also racist, drawing attention to how it "has become corporatized and standardized" (p. 4). Because the underlying systems and structures in U.S. teacher education are established to privilege whiteness, such exams normalize around a "white" standard as well. Counter-narratives offer insights into the racialized meanings of why some Teachers of Color "succeed" or "fail" on the edTPA and also describe the socio-political context in which some teachers purposefully choose not to submit an edTPA—as an act of resistance protecting immigrant families against race-based threats to their U.S. residency. Acting as culture workers (Freire, 1998/2005), these teachers demonstrate excellence in political action to counter racist standardization.

Critical Whiteness

Jupp et al. (2016) define *whiteness* as the "hegemonic racial structurings of social and material realities operating in the present moment that perpetuate racialized inequalities and injustices" (p. 1154). Within the study of whiteness are whiteness studies and critical whiteness studies—whereas whiteness studies is descriptive in nature, critical whiteness studies (CWS) differentiates itself in challenging the deep intercentricity of whiteness with structural racism. Deeply problematic, whiteness studies was branded a fad of the late 20th century (Nayak, 2007), particularly in how it centered white narratives in dealing with and navigating race and racism.

In teacher education, applications of whiteness studies rehashed deficit narratives of communities of Color. As White pre-service teachers were encouraged to engage their identities as racialized subjects, they inevitably positioned students of Color as problems to be solved and too often saw themselves as saviors—perpetuating racist narratives and power hierarchies. This early work yielded basic responses in which White pre-service teachers named their white privilege (McIntosh, 1988/2015) and were rewarded for performing the acceptable corresponding identity (Lensmire et al., 2013). Whiteness

studies and CWS grew out of and alongside other movements intended to name and reject whiteness. These movements grounded White teacher identity studies (Jupp et al., 2016) in teacher education.

In his extensive historical research, Roediger (2005) has exposed the power of whiteness in how those who could be labeled as white consolidated across social class and economic status in the deepening subordination of People of Color, and especially African Americans. Focusing on the U.S. in the 20th century, Roediger urges readers to analyze the complex history of the whitening of America as a discursive process that was—at least—somewhat calculated by those in power who, at the beginning of the 20th century feared that the U.S. was "about to lose its racial moorings" (p. 7). This inherent racism led to widening the net of who could be considered white to include all people of European descent and, in some cases, those of Asian descent. As a result, fearing the stigma of being labeled as dark or other, these populations sought to be seen as White and jettisoned their family histories and identities, creating a culture vacuum filled by racism (Leonardo, 2012).

In teacher education, Picower (2009) assesses the perpetuation of whiteness through hegemonic narratives about white superiority and the ways in which pre-service teachers actively protect whiteness narratives in maintaining their privilege and "white racial culture" (Leonardo, 2012, p. 118). Rather than assigning innocence to these teachers, Picower (2009) examines pre-teachers' active role and agency in guarding the territory of whiteness. Important in this research study is a question of any of the ways in which whiteness is protected, particularly in the one-on-one interviews, and my role as a White researcher. This can be seen in some teachers' narratives relating to American meritocracy, including narratives of immigration and narratives that reject their experience of racism, as well as narratives that evidence internalized racism. Through CNA analysis, this study will critically examine whiteness across these interviews.

Another important layer of the CWS framework in this study is in how it helps me self-reflect and interrogate my protection of whiteness. Given my role as a White conversation partner (Ochs & Capps, 2001) and researcher who seeks solidarity with the ECE Women of Color teachers in this study, I consider my positionality as important to the CRT and CNA framework. In their literature review of White teacher identity studies, Jupp et al. (2016) urge researchers not to treat White pre-service teachers' identities as monolithic. With these authors, I agree and add that White educational researchers' constructions and experiences of race are complex. They require analysis to expose and upend the white supremacist hierarchies that thrive on silence (Sue, 2015). It is also important to balance such analysis with a priority to not (re)center the experiences of White educators. Of particular concern in my analysis is how whiteness is protected through narratives of support for certification and tests. As such academic support can extend the life of colonizing relations that perpetuate whiteness (de los Ríos et al., 2019; Seward, 2019), I attend to this as well.

Sensitive to the role of assessment as it perpetuates whiteness, Souto-Manning (2019) further demonstrates the entanglement of whiteness vis-à-vis "reform" movements with individual and systemic racism. In doing so, she highlights that both the standards and the assessments serve to protect and benefit the performance of white identities. She notes that,

> institutional discourses on quality and their accompanying high-stakes assessments … pretend to be acultural. Yet given how 'quality teaching' is a culturally drenched concept…, this purported aculturality effectively sanctions quality teaching as Eurocentric, centering Whiteness. (p. 5)

This is further perpetuated through non-neutral evaluations that reward the performance of white identities, wherein Teachers of Color who pass the assessment recognize that they too are performing whiteness in order to pass. Souto-Manning admonishes teacher educators, and by implication, the 80% majority of White teacher educators (Milner & Howard, 2013), to excavate the racist histories that are embedded in standardizing

discourses and their negative effects in cloaking whiteness with a veil of quality. CRT provides a powerful course correction to such prevailing narratives.

Critical Race Theory

In the United States, various legal scholars developed CRT, both a theory and movement that generated from Critical Legal Studies, to give race-specific attention to institutional oppression (Cheruvu, 2014; Crenshaw et al., 1996; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Neal et al., 2015). Scholars such as Derrick Bell (1992) of Harvard Law School led the way in challenging widely circulated pathologizing racialized categories that disempowered racial minorities. This work named the problem of institutional racism in areas of housing, health, career, and education. In 1995, Ladson-Billings and Tate presented a specific agenda for educators to use CRT in their scholarship. This led to applications in education and the beginning emergence of centering intersectionally minoritized ECE teachers' experiences; however, besides Souto-Manning's research, there is still a lack of research in particular that looks at racial disparities and biases in teacher licensure exams that directly employ a CRT framework, and more work is needed that leverages the robust potential of this powerful framework (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Milner & Howard, 2013).

Tenets of CRT

From CRT have evolved certain tenets: an assumption that racism exists in institutional structures and serves purposes of perpetuating middle-class white supremacist ideology; a rejection of meritocracy or equal opportunities for all, especially under the law; attention to intersectionality, where racism's impact can only be understood in terms of other identities such as gender, class, and sexual orientation, amplifying the effects of racism; the importance of experiential knowledge and the use of

counter-stories to esteem the experiences of racialized individuals; and finally, a commitment to social justice action to subvert the negative impacts of racism (Crenshaw et al., 1996).

Racism as endemic. Critical legal scholars borrow language from the life sciences to describe racism as *endemic*, highlighting that it is native to our systems and structures. Thus, hidden racism is du jure, and often it cannot be adequately named. Likewise, as racism is understood to be endemic in this study, whiteness is understood to protect the status quo in order to maintain white supremacy, which depends on racist disadvantages and deepens harm to People of Color.

Rejection of dominant ideologies. This tenet addresses the specific ways in which race continues to be hidden and perpetuated within institutions of power (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). CRT scholars reject the notion of equality and equal opportunities under the law—i.e., the myth of a meritocracy. Known dominant ideologies that encode racism into their underlying assumptions include institutional claims for "objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 26). The manifestation of such ideologies is prevalent in assumptions regarding teacher certification testing, as white middle-class norms for teaching proficiency and standardized achievement ignore not only unequal access to the types of education that lead to proficiency on such exams, but also the inherent bias encoded into exams, which are normed to white middle-class ways of being (Souto-Manning, 2019; Tillman, 2004).

The centrality of race and racism. CRT differentiated from critical legal studies in making the study of racism and its effects on systems and structures of oppression its focus. Scholars draw attention to the importance of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), where race and racism are understood in terms of "their intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 25). Solórzano and Yosso further describe this as the "intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination" (p. 25). Such a

distinction is necessary, because analyses inevitably fail in trying to explain specific instantiated effects of discriminations that individuals face as raced, sexed, classed, etc. beings. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), "We recognize the importance of both gender- and class-based analyses while at the same time pointing to their shortcomings vis-à-vis race" (p. 49). Thus, this tenet centralizes race and racism to avoid the common problem of over-simplifying the particular oppressions that are compounded through their effects. Given that I ground this research study in learning from intersectionally minoritized ECE teachers (Souto-Manning, 2018), CRT is thus essential to naming and describing the intersectional problems experienced by teachers in this study. Moreover, addressing the entanglement of whiteness and its protection (Picower, 2009) with analyses of teachers' counter-narratives will yield better analyses overall.

The importance of individual experience. The third tenet represents the driving motivation in CRT to challenge white-dominant narratives that perpetuate racialized disadvantages. Through counter-narratives, individuals who have experienced forms of racism and oppression can respond to claims of neutrality in whiteness and other majoritarian discourses. If such ideologies erase the experiences of those in communities of Color, then counter-narratives, counterstories, testimonios, and other forms of revisionist counter-discourse provide essential tools in upending racist power. Formats for relaying individual experiences might include "storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, *testimonios*, and narratives" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). However, experiential knowledge in education scholarship must extend beyond recounting individual experience—it must be embedded into the very tools used to do research, revisioning People of Color's "racialized, gendered, and classed experiences … as sources of strength" (p. 24). CNA as a methodological and analytic frame is particularly important to this work in that it enables researchers and participants to co-create "social interactions as places for norms to be challenged and changed" (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 163).

Strategic use of interdisciplinary knowledge and methods to combat racism. CRT is impossible without a truly transdisciplinary way of thinking and interpreting the world. CRT is at once cultural and historical excavation (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and discursive analysis (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). CRT is based upon critical legal scholarship, which has expounded the many ways in which racism is embedded in major institutions, but its life and implications are drawn out in fields as various as education, medicine, and literary criticism. In this study, I draw on anthropology (Roth-Gordon, 2003), applied linguistics (Ochs & Capps, 2001), education studies (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), the history of education (Hogan, 1996), sociology (Nayak, 2007), legal studies (Crenshaw et al., 1996), and critical whiteness studies (Jupp et al., 2016; Picower, 2009; Roediger, 2004) in order to account for the embedded, deeply complex problem of early childhood teacher certification testing.

A commitment to justice. CRT, rooted in the dialectic between theory and action, requires a commitment to justice. Dixson and Rousseau (2005) cite Derek Bell's two-year protest of Harvard's lack of women of Color on its faculty as one key example. CRT scholars integrate action and protest as part of their scholarship. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) note that participants' empowerment is an important component of this tenet. However, not all justice-seeking contributions will manifest in the same ways. I analyze those moments in which critical meta-awareness (Souto-Manning, 2014) enables teachers to challenge and change their realities through interviews and an affinity-based focus group, as well as how whiteness and racism were recycled in the teachers' and my narrative co-constructions. This has provided directions for future research and actions, such as additional work to engage with other White teacher educators in solidarity with educators of Color to resist racist standardizing practices and furthering the work of anti-colonial teacher education (Lyiscott et al., 2018). Finally, and most practically, some teachers were certified during the course of this study, highlighting the material

significance of counter-narratives in delegitimizing and challenging racist institutional power.

In this section, I have shown how the tenets from CRT provide a robust and dynamic theoretical model needed to explain issues of inequity in teacher certification testing. In the next section, I briefly highlight some of the specific practical and methodological applications of CRT to this study, with an understanding that theory and practice are not neatly divided in any CRT conception of research.

CRT in This Study

This study draws from all of the major tenets of CRT. It assumes that racism exists in institutional structures such as teacher certification testing. It rejects that there are equal opportunities for all, as the rhetoric of meritocracy would suggest—intersectionally minoritized groups do not have the same opportunities to pass teacher certification tests as their more privileged peers. It seeks to better understand how the intersectionality of race, class, language, and gender intensifies the felt consequences of institutional racism. This study also draws from experiential knowledge including counter-narratives and CNA with teachers. Taken together, CRT's tenets informed the CNA methodology and provided a frame for understanding teachers' experiences of exams.

At the crux of this research is the belief that teacher licensure tests are not fair, and they overtly marginalize anyone who does not fit the white middle-class ideal. However, according to Dixson and Rousseau (2005), in order to establish research within CRT, education researchers must employ connections to legal issues or legal scholarship. This research is tied to the legal scholarship, because there have been several legal cases that addressed the biased nature of professional exams and teacher licensure tests (Ellis & Epstein, 2015). In New York State, *Gulino v Board of Educ*. (2015) deemed that two previous versions of New York State's Liberal Arts and Sciences Test (LAST I and

LAST II) had discriminated against Black and Latinx teacher certification candidates serving as paraprofessionals in New York City schools, because the content of these exams did not closely match what teachers need to know to perform their duties well; yet teachers were excluded from certification due to their failure on this racially-biased exam.

Finally, to understand ECE teacher quality from the perspective of experienced ECE teachers, I elicited their counter-narratives of experience and definitions of teaching quality (Milner & Howard, 2013; Souto-Manning, 2019). Teachers discussed how they mentor less experienced certified teachers, their success as teachers, their effectiveness in parent engagement, and their intersectional identities. In the next section, I describe ECE in the U.S. and how, from its inception, the field has propagated racist ideas.

How Racist Narratives Mischaracterize Teacher Quality

In this section, I review both the histories of deficit labeling in ECE and teaching quality from a racialized perspective. Then, I examine what we know about the standardized assessment of teaching as well as critical frames for researching teacher licensure testing. This section provides a background review for how CRT and CNA align as theoretical and methodological approaches in countering deficit discourses in ECE.

Deficit Discourses of Early Childhood Education

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, views of ECE teachers as caregivers rather than educators have become even more entrenched. In highlighting the "essential" need for childcare for the health of the economy (H.R. 7027, 2020), government officials de-emphasize that children have a right to education (United Nations, 1989) and that those who teach young children are teaching professionals. Moreover, PK-12 teachers

have also been positioned in this historic moment as babysitters rather than educators. As discussed in this section, deficit labeling, broadly pervasive across K-12 schooling and teacher education (Philip et al., 2018), is most acute toward the ECE profession, given its mediocre status.

Genishi et al. (2008) trace how deficit discourses ultimately came out of an inferiority paradigm that emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries as the U.S. was becoming increasingly racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse compared to the White monolingual early founders and citizens of the U.S. "Sunday schools, primary schools, and infant schools … were established to work with the poor and unfortunate" (p. 4) and were designed to reform children from these groups according to a white monolingual standard. Indeed, the very roots of what is called developmentally appropriate practice are grounded in these assimilationist traditions. Ladson-Billings (2006) notes how such views permeated treatment of American Indians as well, leading to a total displacement—geographically, materially, politically and culturally—which positioned them as though they "belonged nowhere" (Momaday, 1969, p. 5).

Near the end of the 19th century, White businessmen holding White Anglo-Saxon Protestant values who were shaping public policy held that immigrants needed to be "civilized" in order to be successful in schools. This cultural deprivation paradigm re-emerged during the War on Poverty in the 1960s, guiding contemporary philosophies of teaching young children. Within national policy, these views established precedents for the presumed role of early education in the lives of poor and racially minoritized children and families. Legislation such the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 "led to the creation of Head Start, which aimed to provide 'disadvantaged' children some of the educational experiences and 'advantages' they lacked" (Goodwin et al., 2008, p. 5). The program was established to create "equal opportunity," but it "labeled the culturally and linguistically diverse and poor as deficient or culturally deprived and sought to 'fix them" (p. 5).

Deficit language is still pervasive in discourses produced to procure funding for early childhood programs wherein arguments are given, consistent with racist arguments in *Brown*, through the lens of white middle-class superiority rather than on the basis of the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Head Start, for example, the largest provider of early childcare in the United States, has historically relied on deficit narratives of families living in poverty (Goodwin et al., 2008; Valdés, 2016) and continues to rely on such notions to secure funding and reauthorization. In a 2016 resolution commemorating the 50th anniversary of Head Start, the House of Representatives stated that Head Start would prepare children to "combat poverty's great weapons—hunger and malnutrition, illness and poor health, ignorance, and cultural deprivation" (H.R. 92, 2016).

The ECE workforce is increasingly labeled with deficit narratives that they are not sufficient to teach America's children, and the national thrust toward UPK is accelerating this problem, pushing out the existing workforce in favor of a whiter, younger population that fits the white middle-class norm. Whereas targeted pre-kindergarten programs, such as Head Start, were designed to address deficit-views of children and families living in poverty, and/or students with special needs, UPK is packaged as part of federal economic development intended to unburden middle-class White families of the increasing costs of childcare (Sherfinski, 2013). Thus, under the banner of deficiency, calls to increase ECE teaching quality are emerging in tandem with calls to make pre-kindergarten universal. Though rarely addressed, such calls for quality serve to stigmatize the current workforce with a deficit perspective (Bloch et al., 2014), in ways that are entangled with racism and bigotry, yet cloaked in the moral appeal of quality. Therefore, urgent attention is needed to expose the everyday effects of the situated racist history on which so-called quality discourses are based.

Deficit Discourses in K-12 Education

The "'manufactured crisis'" (Tillman, 2004, p. 301) of K-12 education by and for African Americans following *Brown* positions Teachers of Color as insufficient and their students as in need of saving. Whereas before *Brown*, Carter G. Woodson (1933) argued that the miseducation of children of Color came from being deprived of their own history, *Brown* and Johnson's War on Poverty wreaked havoc on their education by blaming their communities and culture for their lack of so-called achievement.

> Deficit approaches to teaching and learning, firmly in place prior to and during the 1960s and 1970s, viewed the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of many students and communities of Color as deficiencies to be overcome in learning the demanded and legitimated dominant language, literacy, and cultural ways of schooling. (Paris, 2012, p. 93)

Paris emphasizes deficit pedagogy within a racist context, and he closely links it to the research on the culture of poverty rhetoric, which has been laden with racist discursive markers since its inception.

Standardization and Standardized Testing in U.S. Education

The standards movement, which accelerated the proliferation of teacher certification, was the direct result of deficit labeling of teaching and teacher education (Philip et al., 2018; Souto-Manning, 2019). *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983), commissioned by the Reagan administration, purported to confirm all the worst fears of the white middle-class—that United States education was on the decline (Leonardo, 2007)—justifying standards-based neoliberal reforms. However, these new standards arguments reinforced an already racialized education system with a façade of rigor. Legislators treated *A Nation at Risk* as a unifying clarion call. From it, they cultivated a bi-partisan policy environment, now almost 35 years old, in which teachers and teacher education are blamed for supposed failures in student achievement and the relative decline of US K-12 test scores internationally. Now,

with calls for higher standards and certification requirements for ECE teachers, this milieu is also impacting expectations for ECE.

The perception of an achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Leonardo, 2007) has, since the time of *A Nation at Risk,* been codified into more legislation under various administrations since Reagan, often through reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. With the highly qualified provision of ESEA, established under George W. Bush, *No Child Left Behind* has particular implications for this study, as it required that states establish increased accountability measures to ensure teacher content knowledge, leading many states, including New York, to implement or accelerate standardized certification testing to meet this requirement (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2014; University of the State of New York [USNY], 2006). This trend followed nationally, as Hill et al. (2012) have documented. Established to exclude Teachers of Colors from the profession following desegregation (Tillman, 2004), such tests are part of a neoliberal project that further narrows already myopic and deficit-based teacher education curricula (Philip et al., 2018; Souto-Manning, 2019). Leonardo and Grubb (2013) demonstrate that when standardized tests account for standards-based learning, then instead of standards driving curricula, curricula are dictated by testing. This is particularly true in poor and racially minoritized communities, where surveillance is most deeply felt (Anderson, 2019), and this is also true in teacher certification reform. The added harm that increasing standardization has on such communities cannot be overstated.

The grounding assumption that tests accurately and fairly measure abilities has been proven untrue and has been established in research for decades (e.g., Wallach, 1976). Nevertheless, standardized tests are defining school curricula in low-income communities of Color as well as the teachers in these communities who are deemed sufficiently “good” (Souto-Manning, 2019) to gain legitimated professional status through certification. The romanticized notion that tests provide objective measures of

learning is based on the meritocratic myth, which CRT seeks to challenge. In this study, given the cycles of standards-based learning and other reforms that lead to the proliferation of testing, ECE teachers are subjected to high-stakes certification exams that grossly oversimplify teaching quality. As Wallach (1976) concluded over 40 years ago, "academic skills assessments are found to show so little criterion validity as to be questionable bases upon which to make consequential decisions about students' futures. What the academic tests *do* predict are the results a person will obtain on other tests of the same kind" (p. 57, emphasis in original).

In this study, I sought to employ teachers' counter-narratives to specifically address the outsized role of such tests in their career trajectories and experiences as stigmatized teachers. Moreover, I sought to examine how such tests further frustrate their opportunities to increase wealth and enter the middle class. According to Grant-Thomas and Powell (2014), "the leading edge" of structural racism actually results from "inter-institutional relations" where "nonrace factors" such as social class-status "interact with race in patterned ways" (pp. 4-5). In this study, I challenge prevailing narratives that teacher certification tests are race neutral. Given the recent proliferation of high-stakes tests in teacher certification, little research exists on the whole PK-12 and even less work exists that addresses the experiences of ECE teachers, since their certification is increasingly aligning with K-12 standardization (Fuller, 2007). To problematize and interrupt typical constructions of this research problem, I drew on Souto-Manning's (2018) attention to how ECE teachers, especially those teaching children ages 0-5, are uniquely intersectionally minoritized due to the economically compounding effects of their having intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1991) as Women of Color and working in an undervalued profession while facing other interlocking forms of oppression (Souto-Manning, 2018). Still centering race and racism, I developed the theoretical framework based on related critical theories that place the onus of social problems on structures of power in helping explain some teachers' perpetual failure on exams.

Teacher Licensure Testing and Reproduction in Education

The research on testing and reproduction in education complements the CRT framework used here, specifically because it exposes how mainstream white Eurocentric discourses protect middle-class and bourgeois status quos. In this section, I explore the role of White dominant discourses and/or structures in undermining the efforts of Teachers of Color and linguistically minoritized teachers to become certified as well as teacher educators' best efforts to support these teachers in that process.

"Discourses" of whiteness. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977/1990) argue that standardization itself is a tool to maintain the status quo in schools. Providing a view of language as dynamic, the authors argue that language that would have otherwise evolved in everyday parlance—assuming that language is primarily social and oral—is instead encoded into the special language of school, which is maintained through the "stabilizing intervention of scholarly or fashionable legitimating agencies" (p. 115) such as institutional testing, whether standardized or not. The authors theorize this as a social class issue, where only the elite can access the requisite mastery.

Similarly, in the United States, Gee's (1989/2001) definitions of *Discourse* and *discourse* have dominated assumptions in educational research about language and power. His popular construction of "Big D" and "Little d" discourses has helped many educational scholars differentiate between how language is encoded into macro power structures ("Big D") and how it is used in everyday language ("Little d"). However, there is a cost to utilizing Gee's conception of discourses, because it too is framed within a deficit perspective. In his seminal essay on discourse, Gee argued that if one was not born into particular (read: White, socially elite) discourses, they had little to no chance of fully acquiring such discourses, even though it was assumed they should try. In her critique Delpit (1995/2001) noted that Gee had singled out "'women and minorities'" (p. 547). Gee's analysis creates a binary of language use that reproduces academic Eurocentric language as the norm and ignores the possibility of more fluid discursive improvisation

of non-dominant vernaculars, which outsiders might use to improve on and reposition so-called mainstream discourses (Alim & Smitherman, 2012).

There are similarities in Bourdieu and Passeron's conception of bourgeois discourse and Gee's conception of elite discourses. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977/1990), "bourgeois language can be adequately handled only by those who, thanks to the School, have been able to convert their practical mastery, acquired by familiarization within the family group, into a second-degree aptitude for the quasi-scholarly handling of language" (p. 115). The key difference between Bourdieu and Passeron's conception and Gee's is that Bourdieu and Passeron take up a structural critique as opposed to a deficit perspective. Their focus is on revealing the arbitrary nature of the elite status of discourse of the French bourgeois and the structural constraints of accessing power discourses. Whereas Gee treats dominant discourses as hopeless but necessary aspirations, reinscribing a protection of whiteness, Bourdieu and Passeron imply a critique of the social structure and thus, consistent with CRT, treat social exclusion as systematic rather than individual (Ladson-Billings, 2016). Though deterministic in their view, Bourdieu and Passeron manage to implicate the culture and language as it is used in situations that privilege elites rather than reproduce a deficiency narrative about those without power.

Particularly relevant to this study, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977/1990) address disparities in a bourgeois testing approach compared to how the working class or proletariat might answer similar test questions. They explain that the bourgeois in France were more likely to guess answers on exams based on their sense of entitlement, and their examples are illustrative. In one archival study, the authors found that students from the French bourgeoisie were more likely to make "off-handed" guesses on vocabulary tests (p. 118), even though the words presented were not real words. The ability to take such risks with ease reflects how dominant cultures often flout their own standardizing norms; because of their privilege, advantages such as these abound for those in power (Kendi,

2019). In this study, teachers' engagement with tests often reflects opposite responses. Like teachers in Souto-Manning's (2019) study, most teachers in this study experienced deep anxiety as a result of testing, and at least two teachers experienced depression that involved professional mental health support. Instead of rubber stamps to be completed, these tests invoke extreme anxiety and provoke a sense of "unselfing" (Tillman, 2004), wherein teachers yield to a narrative that, indeed, they are insufficient. Thus, whiteness and mainstream discourses such as those on standardized certification tests designate the identities of Teachers of Color (Roberts & Andrews, 2013) as incapable. While teachers in this study speak their truth to the powerful system of testing, they do so at tremendous unnecessary cost to their own well-being in the context of precarious material realities.

In analyzing teachers' experiences with testing, it can be easy to offer a romanticizing narrative that places the onus on Teachers of Color to simply "Learn the discourse of the test!" This reinscribes the power of whiteness in teacher certification. In this study, I employ a multi-faceted view of language and power, consistent with the interdisciplinary tenet of CRT within a CNA framework to analyze teachers' experiences and counter-narratives about their teaching quality. In the next section, I provide an historical account of how professional certification exams reproduce social status quos and further complicate the experiences of racially and linguistically minoritized teachers.

Professionalization and protection of social status quos. Concern for teacher quality often leads to discussions of teacher certification, but rarely is thoughtful analysis carried out regarding the realities of ECE teachers—who have multiple responsibilities while being underpaid. In this section, I explore research on working class achievement in the professions, with particular attention to exams as tools that perpetuate stratification.

In their work describing how they supported teaching certification candidates to pass licensure tests, Ellis and Epstein (2015) point to the eugenics testing of the 1920s in order to claim the historical legacy of tests as racist. However, tests were administered for social stratification before this time (Hogan, 1986; Leonardo & Grubb, 2013; Spolsky,

1995). Hogan (1986) argues that professional tests in general (e.g., medical and legal exams) have served to protect the interests of upper middle-class Whites at the expense of those of lower social class and status in the 20th century. As the exchange value of high school diplomas and later, college degrees, decreased, professional tests were implemented to secure the status of those in power and their children. New professional tests specifically marginalized people who had received professional education but were working class or poor, similar to teachers in this study. Given that professional licensing exams purposefully favor White middle-class test-takers within a larger opportunity structure (Grant-Thomas & Powell, 2014; Hogan, 1986), we must consider social stratification as part of a larger analysis of how racist structures and whiteness are recapitulated over and again, netting exponential harm, particularly on communities of Color.

In the area of gender, of some interest in this study, competitive exams also have a history in Eurocentric patriarchy (Deslandes, 2002; Souto-Manning, 2019) and more recently have been tied to racial capitalism (Anderson, 2019) as well. Thus, the ways in which standardized tests are masculinized provide even more context for understanding Women of Color ECE teachers' multiple minoritizations. In my analysis, I highlight the ways in which male-dominated discourses of achievement have added negative effects on teachers in this study. In the next section, I look at research that has specifically focused on the certification testing experiences of Teachers of Color.

Critical Frames for Research on Teacher Licensure Testing

Most of the research that specifically targets issues of race in teacher certification draws from the tenets of CRT, but very few studies use a specific CRT methodology. Here, I compare a small body of work that seeks to directly mitigate the effects of certification testing by offering support to pre-service teachers compared with a larger body of work that examines the experiences of Teachers of Color in taking exams.

Overall, this literature shares strengths related to CRT in their common view of the centrality of race and intersectionality, a rejection of meritocracy, and the use of interdisciplinary perspectives. Where they differ is in their emphasis on social justice and highlighting personal experience. Also, though most of the practically oriented literature focuses on "supporting teachers" in the short-term to pass exams using a specific CRT framework, it is often less theoretically rigorous than the literature highlighting teachers' experiences. Therefore, I conclude with an exploration of critical frames that served to further inform analysis in this study.

Teacher certification tests as a barrier to entry. The research literature on how certification testing creates a barrier to entry is relatively new, aligning with the development of fields such as CRT and CWS in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Ladson-Billings (1998), who, with Tate, had just three years prior introduced CRT to the field of education research (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), was one of the first education researchers to sound the alarm that expanding high-stakes assessments would have compound intersectional effects for licensure candidates being assessed in low-resourced communities. She addresses how Teachers of Color would be disadvantaged in new video-based performance assessments (a precursor to edTPA), writing about one assessor's criticism that a Teacher of Color did not have as elaborate a classroom as another teacher. Rather than being neutral, such exams thrive on exclusion (Souto-Manning, 2019) and exemplify Ladson-Billings's (2006) argument for an education debt, due to the property value of whiteness in creating educational privilege in teaching (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and teacher education (Mensah & Jackson, 2018).

Consistent with the findings highlighted in Tillman (2004), testing provided a means for less qualified White teachers to remain in the profession as Teachers of Color were being pushed out. The legacy of testing teachers reveals its long-term agenda and suggests a need for radical change. Souto-Manning's (2019) CNA with teachers based on their experiences of the edTPA more than 20 years following Ladson-Billings's (1998)

warning that teacher performance assessments would strengthen systems of oppression demonstrates the durability of such systems and need for aggressive change responses to so-called reforms that procure profits from manufactured failure in communities of Color (Love, 2019) for large testing companies such as Pearson (Anderson, 2019).

Other research from the early stages of heightened teacher certification testing following late 20th century "reforms" (e.g., Albers, 2002; Flores & Riojas, 1997) describes barriers to entry created by timed, standardized multiple-choice certification exams. This includes the Praxis I and II exams, owned by the College Board, the same company that owned the New Teacher Examination, which pushed Teachers of Color out from the profession (Tillman, 2004). Praxis I is used to determine "basic literacy," and Praxis II is a field-specific test, purporting to address teachers' specific content-area knowledge. Flores and Riojas (1997) demonstrated that linguistically minoritized teachers were disadvantaged by such exams, despite their skill in working with English language learners and their families. In this study, for those teachers who felt acute pressure to pass exams, test failure caused particular and protracted harm, including depression and lost wages in the tens of thousands of dollars as well as unemployment. Similarly, Albers (2002) demonstrated that Black teachers can internalize test results as valid reflections of their teaching quality, and thus failure compounds their multiple experiences of minoritization.

Most of the focus in the other existing literature on teachers' experiences of certification test bias has examined teachers' experiences with so-called basic skills exams, such as Praxis I, which are required for entry into some teacher education programs (Graham, 2013). These studies in particular are insightful in how they trace the legacy of structural racism through differential advantages across the educational trajectories of pre-service teachers, sometimes reporting generational demographics, such as parents' educational attainment and challenges that dated back to their K-12 education, confirming the role of disparate opportunity structures on teachers' success on exams.

Lemberger and Reyes-Carrasquillo (2011) look at the impact of New York State teacher certification exams on ESL teachers' experiences with licensure exams using a longitudinal format. They not only interviewed teachers to learn about their experiences and the stress that results from taking and re-taking the tests, but they also, like Palardy and Rumberger (2008), used observational data to look at teaching quality based on teachers' classroom effectiveness, as judged by established observation protocols and compared with teachers' certification status and experiences over time. This research contributes an important perspective of what teachers experience as they navigate, not just test failure, but protracted failure, once out of school and working with sub-par non-certified wages. Thus, it reveals the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) to them in operation as the accumulating effects of test bias on their livelihood, morale, and experiences of teaching. Moreover, only recently (e.g., Souto-Manning, 2019) has established research begun to provide sufficient understandings of how teachers compare their quality to the official ways in which they were labeled by gatekeepers. On the whole, Teachers of Color have been disenfranchised from the profession since *Brown* (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Souto-Manning, 2019; Tillman, 2004; Walker, 2013), and racist licensure tests serve to continue that legacy, which must be challenged and changed. In the next section, I review research that takes up an action-oriented perspective, much of which draws from aspects of CRT.

"Supporting" teachers to pass exams. Some of the existing literature has focused on how institutions such as colleges and schools of education support Teachers of Color to pass licensure exams (Ellis & Epstein, 2015; Nnazor et al., 2004). Enacting the activist orientation of CRT, these studies directly address racialized inequality on tests. Critical of testing, the authors in this category nevertheless place the onus for change on students and institutions. While addressing the immediate problem of supporting teacher certification, the existing work in this category does not yet go far enough in working with teachers to problematize the tests. Ellis and Epstein (2015)

theorize how to prepare teachers for tests within a CRT framework, emphasizing what strong community-based programming for test preparation looks like, such as flexible test support for students who work full-time while they complete their degrees. This work, wherein faculty compensated for structural inequities that produce teachers' failure on exams, most closely resembles my work with teachers in New York's Pre-K Teacher Preparation Project (PKTPP) that provided test preparation for New York City ECE teachers who had not passed certification exams—including several teachers who volunteered to participate in this research study.

In this research study, I compare Ellis and Epstein's (2015) experiences to some of the interventions teachers described in their interviews. I also explore how whiteness can unwittingly be perpetuated, despite good intentions, through such support systems. As argued by Souto-Manning (2019), our focus should be on revising racist assessments. In an effort to support teachers to become certified, faculty can lose sight of the long-term goal of abolishing tests. Whenever such interventions are employed as a "stopgap" to help some teachers navigate the difficulties of the system, a process of re-mediating (Gutiérrez et al., 2009) teachers from "non dominant" cultures must be employed in order to reject the dominant culture's narrative about such teachers. While Ellis and Epstein (2015) offer a premier example of the potential of such action-oriented support to create change for individual teachers, they fail to address the larger systemic issues of teacher licensure testing. Finally, despite its strengths, this work focuses on the efforts of faculty-authors and their narratives of experience; it fails to address the pre-service teachers' experiences in their own words. Critical research cannot call itself *critical* if it does not first learn from participants what they consider most critical about the issues under study (Souto-Manning, 2014). Thus, through critical dialogue with and among participants, I center teachers' counter-narratives in a process of collective transformation.

Teachers' experiences with certification exams. Here, I review the literature frame that, from a critical perspective, is most closely aligned with this study's focus on

the certification experiences of intersectionally minoritized teachers. Based on a review of the extant empirical research in this area, I discuss the need for additional research that utilizes a CRT and CNA framing—which builds on the transformative potential of learning from teachers' experiences in a dynamic interview and analysis methodology. Such research is needed to revolutionize professionalism, certification, and teaching quality while promoting justice in the ECE profession.

Bennett et al. (2006) highlight racially, ethnically, and linguistically minoritized pre-service teachers' experiences with certification tests at a "Big 10" predominantly white university, providing a foundation for other research that also explores the topic of teachers' experiences. Graham's (2013) research, situated at a Historically Black University, adds the important dimension of teachers' experiences of exams in that context. Graham draws attention, in visceral detail, to the inequities in systems of schooling that ultimately lead to greater certification challenges for pre-service Teachers of Color. For example, the study highlights how students who experienced repeated failure also had lower SAT scores than their peers. One participant in the study reported that his family could not afford test preparation for the SAT, and therefore he could not work to improve his score like his classmates. In this research, I call into question how financial resources for test preparation and tutoring, as well as access to quality education commensurate with well-funded schools, have disadvantaged pre-service Teachers of Color to such an extent that it invalidates most, if not all, high-stakes assessments for teachers.

Bennett et al. (2006) compared interview data with data from students' prior history, including parents' level of education and the students' SAT scores. Their findings also echo the notion that a structural accumulation of education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) explains intersectionally minoritized teachers' failure on exams. Pre-service teachers who had the lowest Praxis I scores also had low SAT scores in high school, and pre-service teachers who had low SAT scores also had parents with the

lowest educational attainment. Furthermore, students struggled most with exams if they had had a low-quality K-12 education (Bennett et al., 2006). One pre-service teacher in the study decried the testing system, demonstrating Leonardo and Grubb's (2013) discussion of structural inequities in schooling: "I don't understand [why] we are holding everybody to the same standard [on the PRAXIS I test], but we are not all taking the same classes and we are not learning the same stuff" (Bennett et al., p. 554).

Dixson and Rousseau's (2005) description of the inherited cumulative impacts of the "property value of whiteness" (p. 24) is clearly reflected in this line of research. While, with Dixson and Rousseau, I reject deficit discourses about Teachers of Color, it must be acknowledged that pre-service Teachers of Color sometimes enter their education majors underprepared due to structural inequities that result from attending school in poorer districts where they had "larger classes [taught by] less qualified instructors" (p. 24). The impact of their sub-standard education "would then be passed along to the students whom they would later teach" (p. 24). Likewise, Mensah and Jackson (2018) show that cultural relevance and the property value of whiteness in the field of science lead some elementary education majors to enter programs unprepared to teach science. These are just two clear examples of structural inequities that are perpetuated in institutions and manifest on standardized exams (Leonardo & Grubb, 2013). Despite their validity issues, such tests provide us with "some insight" about how PK-12 students of Color compare with White students (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 142). Thus, in this study, I name and address the second-generational impacts of whiteness as property in education, as well as disrupt conventional white middle-class notions of teaching quality and their corresponding assessments.

Lemberger and Reyes-Carrasquillo (2011) provide particularly relevant connections to this study in their exploration of bilingual and ESL teachers in New York State who experienced failure, and sometimes protracted failure, on some of the same certification tests that bewitched teachers in this study. The authors compare teacher

interviews about certification and their teaching quality with the researchers' own observations, drawing dubious conclusions about the correlation between teaching quality as observed and teachers' success or failure on exams. In Chapter VII, I will return to this issue as a way of challenging the existing metrics used for determining the cut-off scores for passing certain tests. Like Legeros (2013) and Hill et al. (2012), Lemberger and Reyes-Carrasquillo (2011) conclude that those teachers with the most observable challenges in classroom teaching are frequently those with the absolutely lowest scores on standardized assessments. In other words, as suggested by Legeros (2013), if such tests must exist, their cut off scores are excessively high. A lower and more inclusive cut off score, combined with other measures for observing quality, would identify many teachers with the most persistent academic weaknesses and make possible the certification those who score on the cusp of passing. Thus, many barriers to entry create a wasteful burden and undue stress to candidates already in possession of needed skills.

Consistent with Souto-Manning (2019), Lemberger and Reyes-Carrasquillo (2011) also emphasize the importance of ethnically and linguistically minoritized teachers using their language and culture in teaching multilingual learners in early childhood: "Language and culture are inextricably linked and central to teaching. Teachers respect and use children's and families' language and …'funds of knowledge' … to create curriculum and foster learning communities" (pp. 58-59). Thus, in this study, I challenge testing as normal, arguing that intersectionally minoritized children's positive experience of ethnic, racial, linguistic, and cultural affinity with teachers (Easton-Brooks, 2019; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Souto-Manning et al., 2020) must be prioritized over teachers' passing norm-referenced arbitrary exams. Indeed, the success or failure of 21st century public education may rest largely on this value alone.

Petchauer (2014) notes that most of the current research on teacher certification reflects binaries. Either the research critiques the exams in terms of test bias or it emphasizes teachers' qualities. Identifying another problem in the existing research, he

argues for a need for research to reflect the tension between these predominant themes, calling for more "microlevel" analysis of teachers' experiences. Like Petchauer, this dissertation study examined the tension between the larger context and the effects on teachers, but my research comes from a specific CRT perspective rather than a social-psychological one. Furthermore, where Petchauer emphasizes the discrete moments of the testing event, my work examines larger contexts and what the teachers consider to be most important in their experiences, as they work to redefine teaching quality and resituate their experiences within larger institutional narratives. For example, teacher failure is often so protracted that is punctuated by major life events such as the death of immediate family, amplifying experiential harm of such failure on exams. I draw attention to such narratives, as teachers deemed them important, in Chapters IV and V.

As mentioned throughout this chapter, most of the research on teacher licensure exams focuses on pre-service teachers. Few studies besides Lemberger and Reyes-Carrasquillo's (2011) and Souto-Manning's (2019) focus on uncertified teachers who have graduated from programs in teacher education but remain uncertified. This, along with a lack of research addressing the specific certification experiences of ECE teachers, is an important gap in the research literature.

On the whole, existing qualitative research provides a strong foundation for the research conducted in this study, but more work is needed. While the expanding research base described has established the need for critical revisionist frames for understanding the certification experiences of pre- and in-service Teachers of Color, existing frameworks leave room for expansion. According to Dixson and Rousseau (2005) and Milner and Howard (2013), while most qualitative research on teacher education purports to use CRT, it falls short of providing a deep and robust analysis of the many experiential complexities in a context of systemic racism. While some of the literature reviewed here is oriented toward solutions, it is overly focused on the researchers' perspectives. Other research on the topic is race critical, but often lacks all components of a CRT study.

Aside from Souto-Manning (2019), none of the research that focuses on teacher certification attempts to develop a dynamic and dialogic teacher-led account and analysis of the problem of teacher certification. As will be shown, I engaged teachers in the production of race critical counter-narratives that reflect a range of criticality, both in line with and/or resisting the tenets of CRT, and in reproducing and/or challenging whiteness.

So far, my review has focused on the oppressive forces that shape intersectionally minoritized teachers' certification experiences. Finally, I will identify literature that reframes Teacher of Color quality with narratives that not only examine what counts as quality but also transcend defining teachers in relation to the culture of power.

Critical Revisioning to Hegemonic Master Narratives of Quality

CRT and CWS draw on a body of critical theories emphasizing how power and oppression cause harm to those who have been racially marginalized, while protecting the status of white power. Consistent with the call to amplify revisionist histories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Milner & Howard, 2013), in this section I draw attention to critical methodological and theoretical approaches to revising existing master-narratives of teaching quality. Emphasizing an asset-centered focus on Teachers of Color, I shift attention to strengths-based uses of CRT to yield a more powerful analysis in this study. I also draw on related research that will allow me to engage in more specific analysis and unveil the extent of harm caused by teacher certification testing.

Critical Counter-Narratives for Analysis of Teachers' Experiences in This Study

The research above highlights how some Teachers of Color have experienced teacher certification testing. While important to framing this study, this research over emphasize failure among Teachers of Color, serving to reinforce stereotypes. Also, the larger body of research using CRT and related theories can add new perspective to

existing research on the experiences of Teachers of Color with certification. Homing in on CRT research, in this section, I review critical counter-narratives in this larger body of research that support analysis of teachers' counter-narratives in Chapters IV, V, and VI.

Gaslighting and the experience of being expendable. Earlier in this chapter, I cited Derrick Bell's claim that African American rights are contingent on the needs of the protection of whiteness and, therefore, always precarious. Using CRT and narratives-as-identity, Roberts and Andrews (2013) reveal how protracted uncertainty has yielded, in Black educators, a gaslighting effect: "By repeatedly and convincingly offering explanations that depict the victim as unstable, the abuser can control the victim's perception of reality while maintaining a position of truth-holder and authority" (p. 70). In this research study, teachers who completed all or almost all certification requirements still believed they were at the mercy of New York State, demonstrating how the arbiter of teacher certification testing served to act as an abuser, making teachers feel as though they were not secure, even after years of trying and, eventually, becoming certified. In interviews and the focus group, co-constructed CNA disrupted this narrative and, significantly, revealed how some teachers who are certified are, at best, not prepared to meet students' needs compared to some teachers who are not certified. At worse, the actions of some teachers with certification precipitate imminent harm in classrooms.

Implicit bias and challenging microaggressions. While most teachers in this study identified as belonging to some part of the African diaspora, one teacher identified as Bangladeshi-American. She also identified as Muslim but did not wear a hijab, not to conceal her Muslim identity, but rather because her Muslim culture in southeast Bangladesh is casual and does not require women to wear them. In her interviews, she explained the specific ways she experienced microaggressions (Pierce, 1970; Solórzano, 1998; Sue et al., 2007) in being mis-identified as Latina as a result of having the appearance of being "Brown." According to Solórzano, African American psychologist Chester Pierce first published research using the term *microaggressions* in 1970 to

account for the psychological alienation of African Americans in daily life. Sue et al. (2007) and Sue (2008) expounded on this concept to explore the significance of microaggressions in everyday experiences to clinical psychology and practice. While the term has been criticized as minimizing the effects of everyday indignities such as misrecognizing someone or succumbing to stereotypes about a person's race, ethnicity, or other minoritized status (Kendi, 2019), Sue and his co-authors make clear that the impact of microaggressions is severe, particularly because they are cumulative for People of Color and other stereotyped populations. The use of the modifier *micro* in *microaggression* captures the psychological perspective of such acts in the eyes of the perpetrator. The authors explain the root cause of these acts as *implicit bias*.

Later Sue (2015) analyzed the structure and limits of productive and unproductive "race talk," drawing attention to how individuals can challenge microaggressions if they purposefully engage in dialogue with others across racial and ethnic lines in order to promote understanding and challenge the prejudices that cause implicit bias. For example, across many experiences of being misidentified and addressed in Spanish, one South Asian participant in this study pushed back against mislabeling and over-essentializing by asking, "Why did you think I can speak Spanish?" Not romantic about the emotional labor necessary in order to engage in constructive race talk, I engage Sue's (2015) concept to demonstrate this teacher's persistent resistance of master-narratives of identity, providing a way for her to challenge these narratives and gain power using language to reposition herself in contrast to how others positioned her.

Decolonizing counter-narratives of ECE teacher quality. Viruru (2005) argues for the need to employ postcolonial theory, a subfield in literary theory, in teacher education and, specifically, theories of teaching young children. Since its emergence, the field of postcolonial theory has been the subject of debate and criticism. The *post* in postcolonial is problematic in that implies that colonialist practices are in the past when they are still in place through various forms of subjection, including standardized testing.

The *post* in postcolonial also defines the colonized subject in terms of the subjugator, denying them agency. Repositioning postcolonial-informed studies with new language, some researchers have mistakenly taken up the language of "decolonization," which, though well-intended from a rhetorical perspective, undermines decolonization, which seeks the "repatriation of Indigenous land and life" (Tuck & Yang, 2013, p. 1).

Souto-Manning (2018, 2019), Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol (2018), and Goodwin et al. (2008) have established the harm of de jure Eurocentric epistemologies in defining ECE standards of quality, education, curriculum, and care; but little is known about the intersection of teachers' harmful PK-12 experiences with Eurocentric epistemologies and the reproductive effects on how they are deemed unqualified through measures such as state certification tests. Therefore, in this study, I considered how Eurocentric epistemologies as seen in colonialist logic related to measures of teaching quality served as proxies for whiteness.

In the study of English and urban teacher education, researchers have prioritized acknowledging the colonialist histories of English as a global lingua franca due to racial domination leading to, for example, anti-Black linguistic racism (Baker-Bell, 2020). Scholars have responded to this problem with justice-informed frameworks rejecting colonial ideologies in teacher preparation. de los Ríos et al. (2019) argue for "upending" colonial practices such as privileging of mainstream English and linguistic racism in English teacher education, while Lyiscott et al. (2018) present an anti-colonial framework for urban teacher preparation that centers youths and their transformative potential in the preparation of urban educators. In my analysis, I draw on such frameworks to interpret colonialist influences on ECE teaching and teacher preparation within teachers' counter-narratives, specifically guiding how I address linguistic racism as endemic to everyday life. Often, teachers in this study navigate and construct meaning about their experiences with testing and other forms of subjugation in colonialist terms. In moments where teachers recapitulate whiteness, it is while drawing on colonialist logic. Also, for the

South Asian teacher, colonial practices in her K-12 English learning help to explain her difficulty in navigating teacher certification tests now, because she learned in conversational a variety of English that is inconsistent with the mainstream White English (Baker-Bell, 2020) used on certification tests. Thus, I draw on anti-colonial frameworks to make sense of teachers' counter-narratives, particularly within the CNA method of interviewing and analysis.

Racial capitalism as reifying colonialist practices in communities of color. Anderson's (2019) analysis of racial capitalism offers one powerful way to examine such harm, specifically in looking at how the for-profit company, Pearson, targets and extracts money from communities of Color, as represented by teachers here. Anderson focuses on charter schools and other educational ventures that "proliferate" in communities of Color "without any such parallel in affluent communities populated by predominantly White residents" (p. 3). Racial capitalism is the process by which private interests supplant public goods in communities of Color, thereby siphoning off the value of public goods in communities of Color while accumulating profits for themselves. In such a system, "race and gender … have everything to do with *who* does *what* work … and *how* they are rewarded (and/or punished) for it" (p. 4, emphasis in the original). For purposes of this study, Pearson, the purveyor of teacher certification tests in New York State and dozens of other states across the U.S., uses the levers of government to establish that quality is best measured by Pearson's tests and then exacts many tolls on Women of Color teachers, including demotion of professional status. Moreover, it extracts money in the form of test fees and, according to teachers in this study, supports an ecosystem of dubious test preparation companies that further extracts money from them. In this study, this problem is so pervasive that one teacher argued that the state, Pearson, and her public college were "in bed together," because her college profits from test failure by withholding earned degrees until all extraneous requirements for certification are met. Racial capitalism also promotes the practice of inserting mostly White high-turnover

teachers from prestigious universities into communities of Color, deepening the racial divide in making sure children of Color can claim academic learning identities for themselves.

Use and enjoyment of STEM as counter-narrative to failure. In their work studying the appropriation of science teacher identities by preservice Teachers of Color, Mensah and Jackson (2018) employ Harris's (1993) concept of whiteness as property to examine how pre-service elementary Teachers of Color initially do not see science as for them—i.e., as an identity that they have power or access to wield or take up. Because of common hegemonic understandings of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) subjects, including the stereotypes of who can be a scientist (e.g., middle class white males) and because of the contextless way in which STEM subjects like science are taught in most schools, preservice Teachers of Color in their study did not see themselves in the science teacher identity. Using counterstories, the authors unveil the process by which preservice Teachers of Color disaffiliate with science content knowledge in K-12 schooling. They also posit that misunderstandings of who can be a scientist can be reversed in applied, multicultural science methods coursework. Similarly, teachers in this study, attending schools of education across New York City, enjoyed their methodology classes, often culturally relevant and situated according to their needs as New York City ECE teachers. This shows the value of multicultural content methodology in enfranchising teachers into content curricula and rejecting Eurocentric epistemologies and pedagogies at the same time.

Hillard's re-mediation of African-descent students' performance in math. As noted above, Gutiérrez et al. (2009) argue for a re-mediation of remedial support for college students from "non-dominant" communities. In my use of Hilliard's (2003) analysis of students who are young, gifted, and Black, I draw on Gutiérrez et al.'s (2009), concept of *re-mediation*, highlighting the need to re-HYPHEN-mediate how we talk about students in remedial courses. Hilliard re-mediates how students of African descent

are positioned as underperforming by arguing that a failure in high-quality culturally relevant teaching explains misperceptions about these students' achievement. His argument is particularly resonant in my analysis of participants' narratives in this study, as many of the teachers failed the math exam more than once, and some of them have a lifelong history of math failure. I employ Hilliard's critique to explore not just how teachers experience math knowledge as decontextualized from experience, but to argue that teaching failure accounts for challenges teachers face on the math exam for certification.

Teachers of Color have a legacy of resilience (Walker, 2013), including pushing back against narratives that have served to push them out. A range of such counter-discourses was evident in this dissertation study. Thus, it is important to acknowledge not just the challenges that teachers have faced in overcoming and challenging systemic racism, but also to present counter-narratives in terms of the teaching quality they yield in producing superior outcomes for their students in predominantly low-income communities of Color across New York City. This research study transcends narratives of resistance to deficit thinking, meritocratic thinking, and dominant ideologies. Sampling from a rich body of research detailing the ways in which Teachers of Color thrive in their work with children, I argue that we need wholesale change in how we identify, describe, and assess teaching quality.

Summary

Despite the growing body of literature looking at teachers' experiences of navigating certification, there are still important unanswered questions. While Bennett et al. (2006) do share teachers' perspectives on their experiences, there is a lack of focus on what processes for passing exams the teachers found most important. Also, much of the literature is grounded in a critical and critical race framework, but often does not

attempt or fails to execute a sufficiently robust (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005) qualitative analysis of the teacher licensure testing problem. According to Souto-Manning (2014), what is "critical" to participants' experiences may be different from what the researcher has outlined in their study; therefore, research must create space for new kinds of critical research that leaves open-ended the question of exactly what is critical until research has been conducted. Also missing from the current research base are the specific experiences of early childhood teachers, giving full empirical attention to the teachers' experiences and interpretations of their experiences. Emphatically, we need a qualitative research base that privileges participants' interpretations of their experiences, because these experiences up until now have been largely erased by claims that standardized tests K-12 through post-secondary are objective (Hilliard, 2004; Hursh, 2013; Leonardo, 2012; Leonardo & Grubb, 2013). Finally, given the socially and discursively situated nature of exams, it is imperative to better understand in what ways, if any, different understandings of language and dialogue impact teachers' performance on and navigation of the certification test process. In the next chapter, I show how my proposed methodology of CNA will address these practical and theoretical problems.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The research literature reviewed in Chapter II demonstrates the importance of increasing and supporting a diverse teaching force in ECE in order to address the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) that created the shortage of Teachers of Color in the U.S. after *Brown v. Board of Educ.* (1954) (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Tillman, 2004; Walker, 2013). The review also demonstrated a particular area of need in utilizing the full potential of a CRT framework (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Milner & Howard, 2013) to address the research problem through specific attention to the practices of teacher certification testing that disproportionately fail intersectionally minoritized teachers PK-12, and to provide opportunities for ECE teachers to counter-narrate official constructions of their lack of teaching quality in terms of licensure test failure. Certification tests reproduce racist, classist, and sexist norms and are insufficient in predicting teacher effectiveness with students of Color, and particularly, African American students (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010). The literature review shows, consistent with CRT's rejection of meritocracy and the centrality of race and racism, the importance of framing testing practices as racist against Teachers of Color and harmful to the students who will lose opportunities to be educated by them.

In this study, losing ECE teachers of Color from local communities due to their supposed lack of qualifications is understood as harmful to children living in those communities and, therefore, an urgent matter of concern. Moreover, this hurts White

children in perpetuating white supremacy as well (Roberts & Andrews, 2013). The need to address the shortage of Teachers of Color by challenging the so-called qualified teacher shortage must be analyzed both within the deep structure (Tye, 1987) that created the problem and in terms of its current and potential impacts as well. While drawing primarily from CRT, the literature review demonstrated the need for more dialogic and nuanced understandings of the experiences of intersectionally minoritized early childhood teachers (Souto-Manning, 2018) who are being designated as unqualified in teaching shortage rhetoric. To do so, I amplify their counter-narratives of quality as valid in contrast to the dominant master-narrative of teacher quality as characterized based on performance on high-stakes tests alone. Thus, the purpose of this study is to address the research gap through a CNA (Souto-Manning, 2014) of teacher narratives and counter-narratives, asking, through a series of three interviews and one focus group, how intersectionally minoritized early childhood teachers define their teacher quality given their certification test failure—and how they navigate their experiences in this context. The problem of ECE teacher certification is considered to be particularly significant in this study given the ways the possible displacement of minoritized PK teachers can be avoided if addressed strategically and quickly.

Teacher licensure testing is one factor among many that normalizes whiteness and reproduces the myth of a meritocracy and other white middle-class ideological and racially capitalistic discourses about teaching (Anderson, 2019). Therefore, using CNA within a CRT theoretical framework and complementary critical frameworks, I centralize the experiences of intersectionally minoritized teachers seeking certification, while contributing new knowledge to inform ECE teacher credentialing policy. The following questions guided my inquiry:

1. How do intersectionally minoritized teachers who have experienced licensure test failure in New York State (NYS) define professional achievement in early childhood education?

    a. How do these teachers negotiate official definitions of qualified teacher under Article 47 of the New York City Health Code and NYS's UPK legislation with their own understandings of what makes them qualified?
    b. How do these teachers respond to claims that they are not qualified because of licensure test failure?

2. How do intersectionally minoritized early childhood teachers who have experienced licensure test failure in NYS construct and/or co-construct knowledge about the problem of teacher licensure test failure?
    a. What do these teachers see and experience as the local consequences of teacher licensure and testing policies in NYS?
    b. What solutions do these teachers collectively identify as important to solving problems with teacher licensure test failure on exams?
    c. How do these teachers construct and/or narrate their journeys experiencing failure and success?

Research Design/Methodology

According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), CRT is not just a way of looking at the world; it can also serve as a framework for research methodology and analysis. Likewise, more than 10 years ago, Dixson and Rousseau (2005) called for a more rigorous engagement of the analytic potentialities of CRT by engaging all its tenets more comprehensively—a call echoed by Milner and Howard (2013) particular to the need for more robust counter-narratives of Teachers of Color and teacher education. This study uses CRT as a theoretical lens, but it draws heavily on Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) application of CRT to methodology, drawing on their emphasis on counter-narrative as a methodological tool. Here, my primary source of data was teachers' counter-narratives, and my primary methodology was Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) viewed through the

lenses of CRT and critical whiteness. Below, I review what CRT affords this CNA study, and then I show how it was used as a framework with CNA to analyze teachers' counter-narratives of experience and definitions of teaching quality in this study.

Critical Race Theory

Because New York State licensure exams, like other teacher licensure exams, fail a disproportionate number of racial and/or linguistically minoritized teachers (Harris, 2015; Lemberger & Reyes-Carrasquillo, 2011), teachers' experiences of the tests must be understood from the perspective of CRT, which questions how racism permeates institutions through mechanisms such as standardized testing (Neal et al., 2015).

CRT was established as a theoretical framework and research methodology by critical legal scholars who believed that the critical legal scholarship did not well-represent the experience of African Americans in particular. They established CRT as a way to ground critical legal studies in the exceptional inequities experienced by People of Color, with a particular interest in African Americans at the time. Since its inception in the 1980s, CRT expanded to be more inclusive of racially minoritized individuals who do not identify as African American (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), fitting the needs of this study to address the ways in which the tests also negatively impact linguistically minoritized teachers, many of whom are also People of Color. Recently, Souto-Manning (2018) drew attention to the ways early childhood teachers are intersectionally minoritized, based on their multiple minoritizations and status as ECE teachers, building on Crenshaw's (1991) important development of the theory intersectionality, adding important analytical framing to teachers' counter-narratives in this study.

As previously discussed, CRT's roots are in critical legal studies, and thus its tenets center around how the law, especially U.S. law, entrenches the power of whiteness, thereby making equity impossible for People of Color. The legislative and legal history of standardized testing and standards and accountability for teaching and teacher education

relevant to this study make CRT an ideal framework for examining the problem of intersectionally minoritized ECE teacher testing. Some of my pilot study participants and one teacher in the current study were plaintiffs in an embroiled New York City class action law suit (*Gulino v Board of Educ*., 2015) that proved that some New York State licensure tests were racially biased. In this study, I add to what we know about the intersections of legal injustice and ECE teachers' multiple minoritizations in and through testing.

Honing in on the centrality of race and racism and rejection of dominant ideologies as focal to interpretation, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) formally called for use of CRT in education research. Since that time, education research has used CRT to varying degrees of success. According to Dixson and Rousseau (2005), education research that claims to use CRT must incorporate aspects of all tenets, emphasizing the dynamic and dialogic imperatives of the CRT framework. In noting the CRT scholarship that has attempted to make central the knowledge of Teachers of Color, they state, "It is not enough to simply tell the stories of people of color … those stories must then be subject to deeper analysis using the CRT lens" (p. 13). Ultimately, such stories must "move us to action and the qualitative and material improvement of the educational experiences of people of colour" (p. 13). While Ladson-Billings (1998, 2004, 2009, 2007) and Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) historicized educational attainment for students of Color, inspiring change using CRT, Solórzano and Yosso (2001, 2002) have been responsible for the most profound shifts in pushing CRT beyond an analytic frame and expressing it as a methodology. CRT is integral to this study's methodology, which uses CNA to analyze teachers' counter-narratives through the lens of CRT and its tenets.

Critical Narrative Analysis

CNA is an essential element in my methodological response to calls to rigor using the full weight of the CRT tenets (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005), because it allows me to

center the methodology on the experiences of participants. Thus, the line between data collection and analysis was blurred, to ensure that participants analyze their own narratives, positioning their voices as important to educational research, and further developing CRT frameworks for use in education scholarship. While personal narrative can lead to essentialization, there is no replacement for the validity of individual experience (Fuss, 1989), especially regarding racialized life experiences. CNA's powerful incorporation of narratives of experience with analyses of larger social structures, provides more robust analytic frames in scholarship. Also, due to the anti-racist intent of this study, the teachers' experiences, voices, and narratives must be privileged, and my own views must be de-centered. I used CNA to facilitate this shift, as discussed below.

CNA addresses the limitations of narrative research as so focused on the "micro" of individual experience that it fails to connect individual experiences to larger institutional structures, discourses, and impacts, limiting how we understand the intersections of individual agency in a context driven by institutional power. CNA is an appropriate tool to help me answer all research questions, as I examined the ways in which teachers navigated official definitions and discourses. For example, question one, "How do intersectionally minoritized teachers who have experienced licensure test failure in New York State define professional achievement in early childhood education?" when understood through a CNA methodology, enables a multi-layered analysis of teachers' experience within city- and state-level discursive contexts.

Souto-Manning (2014) devised CNA to strengthen the analytic weight of individual narrative and address pitfalls in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA, a methodology developed to counter a specific ideology (neo-liberalism), assumes that "macro" structural constraints determine the unequal experiences of individuals who are marginalized (Fairclough, 2010). In the case of this study, macro-discursive analyses allowed me to explain how certification requirements impacted the lives of

intersectionally minoritized teachers in the study. CDA is poised to address two major tenets of CRT, as it is a systematic interdisciplinary research methodology and is meant to address a social ill "in its semiotic aspect" (p. 235); thus, it is intended to be used to work against macro discursive structures that harm individuals. CDA also potentially silences individual experience as it can be too focused on what the researcher assumes to be the structural problem without enough attention to how institutional discourses impact local interactions and experience (Manning, 2005; Rymes et al., 2005; Souto-Manning, 2014).

CDA was created with attention to Althusser's (1971) ideological discursive formation, which is a theory of how power structures such as neo-liberalism do their "work," discursively, with the particular material effects of maintaining harmful status quos and/or oppressive forces. The ideological discursive formation determines what discourses are recognizable and which ones will be ignored. For example, in the case of this research, there is an extensive body of research proving that standardized tests, and particularly multiple-choice standardized tests, cannot measure teacher quality, but certification tests persist, because those in power who make policy decisions have not heeded this research. Ideological discursive formations determine the range of what is available or sayable, with the possibilities' being built into layers of discourse, which are communicated textually, verbally and non-verbally. For this study, from a CRT perspective, seeing racism in the form of master narratives as part of larger discursive formations is central to understanding the persistence of the teacher licensure testing problem that, despite available research, tests are still used to measure teacher quality.

Due to the emphasis in CDA on the larger discursive formation, it is not possible to adequately trace *how* individuals engage with harmful discourses in their many layers without CNA. CNA, used here with a CRT theoretical framework, addressed this in terms of how teacher quality discourse and certification requirement structures are racist. Often, individuals who are oppressed through macro-discursive frameworks, such as systemic

racism, are not explicitly cognizant of the way power and disadvantage are shaped through language. Using CNA, such power dynamics were made visible in this study. As people question their realities, they also make explicit the inherent injustice and more clearly unveil negative situations as moral problems. In this study, the process of participants' co-constructing the problem of certification supported them in challenging the designated identities (Roberts & Andrews, 2013) that have framed them as unqualified in the larger discourse. While building on the strengths of CDA, Souto-Manning's research exposes its major limitations—as founded on Althusser's concept of the ideological discursive formation—it does not sufficiently account for individual agency (Foucault, 1970/1981, 1972; Rancière, 2012).

The second research question, "How do intersectionally minoritized ECE teachers who have experienced licensure test failure in New York State construct and/or co-construct knowledge about the problem of teacher licensure test failure?" highlights teachers' day-to-day experiences of failure discourses, which included their internalizing failure, leading some to become anxious and depressed, and or de-identify with their teaching identity (Tillman, 2004). Sub-questions such as "What solutions do these teachers collectively identify as important to solving problems with teacher licensure test failure on exams?" enabled me to show teachers' demonstrated agency and awareness on improving systems of ECE professionalization. Also, consistent with strengths-based frames teachers demonstrated their leadership and breadth of knowledge when given opportunities to critique oppressive systems in interviews and focus groups.

Recently, Souto-Manning (2014, 2019) and Souto-Manning and Cheruvu (2016) have demonstrated how CNA methods can apply across a range of North American contexts, looking at how people with limited power were able to co-participate in CNA in order to reconfigure their experiences as marginalized teachers. Souto-Manning (2014) reveals how ECE teachers felt pulled between official requirements that competed with their own sense of what their students needed. When Souto-Manning and Cheruvu (2016)

used CNA in a study of Teachers of Color in a predominantly white institution, they found that teachers either recycled institutional discourses or resisted them, usually in the form of counter-narratives. Teachers' counter-narratives emphasized "racialized experiences," "whiteness as the norm," and "multiple selves/identities" (p. 16). Their final theme, "multiple selves/identities," highlights an important additional contribution of CNA: Through CNA, the researcher does not naively assume a unidirectional progression of raised awareness. Instead, conversational interviews create a dialectical relationship to our collective understanding as selves and identities form in the context of other people while challenging powerful discourses.

More often than not, narratives and identities are in flux, especially when being probed. Through conversational analysis, Ochs and Capps (2001) have noted that "even when tellers adopt a secure, recognized moral grid for interpreting experience, they may be initially uncertain and arrive at their moral perspective incrementally through dialogic construction of what transpired, when, and why" (p. 51). They also note that co-tellers, can help destabilize a tidy narrative. In this study, teachers served as one another's co-tellers in the focus group, and I served as the co-teller in interviews. In examining the "untidiness" in teachers' narratives, I used CNA to understand how teachers, to varying degrees in different moments, recapitulated whiteness discourses, how they were beginning to reject them, and how they rejected them. Also, I noted how teachers' critical meta-awareness emerged in the context of co-tellings. I looked at the contrast between teachers' co-participation with one another in the focus group and my co-participation, as a White researcher, with them in interviews. This allowed me to address which oppressive discourses are most enduring, which ones are up for contestation, and the role of whiteness and the protection of whiteness in the durability of certain master-narratives.

The final sub-question, "How do these teachers construct and/or narrate their journeys experiencing failure and success?" enabled me to delve into how teachers' experiences spoke to the tenets of critical race theory and how their identities are

implicated within that. Given the research focus, addressing the multiple minoritizations and subsequent material and psychological effects experienced by teachers in the study, this affordance of CNA was helpful in demonstrating the ways in which racist institutional discourses are ever-present in the lives of Teachers of Color in this study.

Institutional Discourses Framing the NYC Context for ECE Teacher Certification

As stated in Chapter I, teachers in this study are caught in the middle of a national debate over how credentialed and in what ways ECE teachers need to be qualified in order to teach and, thus, earn a living wage. In New York State, the problem is intensified by pressure for ECE teachers to become certified in birth-through-second grade teaching, which requires the passing of state licensure exams. Participants in test preparation workshops in this state are, disproportionate to the predominantly White and monolingual ECE teaching force, African, African American, Black, Latinx, South Asian, and/or Multilingual. Many are also intersectionally minoritized immigrant teachers. This problem exists due to institutionally racist factors that impact how tests are promoted through policy initiatives, how they are designed, and how they are implemented (Leonardo & Grubb, 2013). Other factors, as discussed in Chapter II, include the unequal education Teachers of Color receive due to racist school funding formulas.

In New York State, there has been a significant problem of racially and/or linguistically minoritized teachers' failing any single exam multiple times. This is evidenced in various news articles (Harris, 2015) and in my pilot study research. In my third pilot study, I sought to understand how teachers navigated the experience of having only one test to pass before being certified and how they shared information (Petchauer & Baker-Doyle, 2014) that others would find helpful in passing the exams in a focus group format. These teachers had been successful completing all other requirements, but they missed passing one exam by as little as one point. One teacher in the pilot group took the same test three times in six months and scored 219, 218, 214, and finally, 247, where the

passing score is 220. This experience and how she narrated it is consistent with the findings of Legeros (2013), who showed that such score differentials are immaterial in terms of teaching quality, and yet, they place an undue burden on teachers who consistently fail by only a few points.

From a CRT perspective, this demonstrates the myth of meritocracy, the centrality of race and racism, and the need for experiential counter-narratives. The implications of six months not being certified represent one to two years of one teacher's being paid a lower salary and fewer opportunities for promotion. Lemberger and Reyes-Carrasquillo (2011) noted that New York State teachers took old exams several times over a course of nearly 10 years before giving up. Likewise, one teacher in my pilot study had taken the same exam 23 times over a course of 11 years before finally passing this requirement to be certified.

Historically, public school Teachers of Color and linguistically minoritized teachers have experienced more New York State certification exam failure than their White monolingual counterparts (Harris, 2014). According to *Gulino v Board of Educ.* (2015), several Black and Latina/o paraprofessionals experienced discrimination, were denied teaching jobs, and/or were demoted from teaching positions due to the irrelevant content of the Liberal Arts and Sciences Test, required for certification at the time the suit was brought. Though the specific tests have changed, this ongoing problem threatens the diversity of the ECE teaching workforce in New York City, particularly among those who are lead teachers or directors, because of new certification requirements in ECE.

Even after teachers have learned how to navigate the institutional and racist power discourses necessary to pass state teacher licensure exams, it sometimes still takes a few test attempts and several months to complete the requirements for several reasons, highlighting their intersectional experiences. For example, in pilot work, I discovered that students who have master's degrees in education compare the educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) to their master's thesis, stating that this portfolio is

more difficult and time-consuming than any single project they completed in school (see also Sato, 2014; Souto-Manning, 2019). There were also complaints about new content on exams. For example, teachers questioned why their exam included Common Core algebra when their certification is through second grade and they do not teach algebra in ECE. Given this context, I review my exploratory work and pilot studies before describing methods for the current study.

Exploratory Work and Pilot Study

Exploratory work and pilot studies spanned from 2014 to 2016, and each study developed my focus for the current research. My exploratory work was a participant observation case study of a substitute teacher completing her master's in ECE. In the course of the study, I found that she, an excellent teacher as defined by the principal who recruited and hired her, was uncertified, because she could not pass New York State's licensure tests. Knowing her skill in building relationships with parents and children, a school principal sought her out to take over the duties of teaching a class of 29 first graders who an experienced, certified teacher apparently could not "manage." In the course of teaching, she effectively built a community of first grade learners and welcomed parents into the classroom daily, and she established her authority with students through shared trust and respect for students and parents. Pilot work followed from this study as I experimented with different focal points in the study of strong teachers who, like her, did not easily pass certification exams.

Pilot Studies

Pilot study one. I also conducted participant observation in Fall 2014, while teaching a student teaching seminar for childhood education in a local college. I positioned myself as a participant observer, drawing on some strategies of teacher

research and self-study to examined pre-service teachers' experiences rather than my teaching. I thus employed my access to students in order to better understand the challenges of certification, especially edTPA, experienced by student teachers. I explored the importance of understanding multiple minoritizations as theorized in CRT—coming to greater appreciation of the need for counter-narratives in my work with teachers. Students were given ample resources in preparation for the study, providing informed consent.

Compelling data from this pilot work demonstrated that many of these pre-service teachers, most who are intersectionally minoritized, have lived circumstances that are constant distractions from their teacher preparation. Given that many had logistical hurdles to completing their edTPAs and other certification requirements, the study challenged the U.S. meritocracy myth, consistent with the CRT tenet challenging the same. Less than 10% of students from the class were certified soon after graduation, and only 30% of this group was fully certified 16 months after graduation. Many reported that once they completed school, they lacked the work-life affordances to finish requirements, again reflecting intersectional minoritizations. Yet, during student teaching, there is simply not time to juggle work, school, and the additional job of preparing for exams. This study echoed other findings that intersectionally minoritized pre-service teachers are disadvantaged in the certification process and confirmed the need for a more in-depth study of teachers' experiences of certification following their graduation.

Pilot study two. In fall 2015, I had been working as a consultant for the Pre-K Teacher Preparation Project (PKTPP), a program sponsored by the City University of New York and its Professional Development Institute (PDI), to help achieve NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio's goal of fully staffing UPK. I worked with over 100 PK teachers seeking certification to maintain their teaching positions under New York City's UPK program. In this study, I wanted to understand how teachers "figure out" (Varenne, 2011) testing, overcoming challenges, despite systemic inequities. I designed a study in which

participants would work on their edTPAs during a tutoring session led by me, followed by a peer-led work session where I observed their writing and they supported one another. This method, corresponding with individual interviews, produced rich data that centered on teachers' cultural and linguistic repertoires used for completing the edTPA. Teachers re-positioned themselves during the peer session, showing more confidence and authority than in the tutoring session, training my eye on teachers' assets, experiences, and counter-stories.

What fascinated me about this test preparation setting still fascinates me from an anthropological perspective. What teachers must do to be certified in New York State is absurd (Petchauer & Baker-Doyle, 2016), and yet, a professional community formed around test preparation, in spite of these circumstances. In the below excerpt taken from my pilot study journal, I reflected on how people navigate uncertainty and further attended to the brilliance of uncertified teachers.

> People respond to policy in ways that we don't expect, and only by looking at what teachers are doing in response rather than examining perceptions of failure, can you really come to understand both what they are doing right and what they are doing "wrong." The idea promulgated in Varenne's essay [2012] has its groundings in Varenne and McDermott's notion of successful failure [1999], which draws [my] attention away from markers of failure as the unit of analysis and puts the attention on the cultures that get created and social networks that are created so that teachers can pass the test or reject the credential system altogether. (December 2014)

Still interested in what I might do to concretely address teachers' unjust circumstances, what I noticed most was that if teachers were doing anything "wrong" that was causing them to fail, it was that they did not speak in meta-pragmatically useful ways (Haddix, 2010; Rymes, 2014) about test taking and their interactions with tests, which left them feeling powerless after taking them. While I did not want to draw attention to deficit perspectives, I was searching for a practical solution to fill a gap in what our test preparation at the time could not provide. Thus, I turned again to the research literature,

this time drawing on repertoire approaches (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014; Rymes & Leone, 2014) to design research without a deficit lens.

Pilot study three. Moving closer to the format of the focus group in the current study, in the third pilot study I sought to understand how teachers developed their knowledge base and shared their knowledge with others in a participatory focus group setting (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). According to Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, participatory focus groups have emancipatory aims in contrast to focus groups generated for marketing and psychological research. This group consisted of eight women who had taken the state's content specialty test more than five times. All of them were participating in a "final push" to pass the exam, one of New York State's "safety nets," before it expired (USNY, 2015), at which time a supposedly "more rigorous" test would replace it. We met once a week on weekends for eight weeks. Through this process, I realized that I was still approaching my research as a teacher rather than as a "teacher-student" (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 61)—this was key to how, in general, I began to position myself in preparation for the focus group. Originally, my goal was to cultivate meta-discursive language about test questions in hopes that test items would become objectified through this process. In my own process of figuring out how to run a focus group and position myself as a facilitator, I asked teachers to bring materials they could share that had been helpful in improving their scores.

Sharing what had worked in the past created a positive environment for teachers to support one another. Even though they had failed the composite exam multiple times, there were certain sections they had mastered, and they seemed to enjoy bringing their knowledge to the setting. This "gift" culture (Graeber, n.d.) helped me fine tune how I wanted to position teachers in this study as authoritative and myself as a learner, a conversation partner (Ochs & Capps, 2001), and a peer who asks probing questions, when needed, to foster critical meta-awareness (Souto-Manning, 2014). The focus group demonstrated how to incorporate a justice component into research. Teachers in the

study, sharing their expertise on various sections of the test, helped each other to pass different sections of the exam, and all teachers in the group, including one teacher who had taken the exam 22 times over nine years, passed and were certified. Seeing teachers help one another while taking ownership of their experiences demonstrated how such a focus group could fulfill the justice mandate of CRT; thus, I chose to use a focus group in the research design to account for how teachers co-construct the problem of teacher certification tests.

Learnings from Pilot Studies

Through these various pilot studies, I came to understand my positionality more, and I began to design a study that centered teachers' self-empowerment as a means to change their oppressive situation. Given my role as a White researcher, I saw our mutual liberation as interdependent and that the more I positioned teachers as authoritative and myself as learner (Freire, 1970/1993), the more our collective dismantling of whiteness would succeed. Thus, the current study was designed to amplify their voices in policy conversations about testing, using counter-narratives to transform master-narratives, and give them many opportunities to reflect on their structurally racist situation. Moreover, I learned that I could not decolonize (Domínguez, 2017) test preparation and moved to an interview-focused research study with a focus group, further shifting to the periphery my authoritativeness and centering their own.

The Research Site

Setting

I conducted individual interviews with 10 teachers all across New York City. Locations, convenient to the teachers, ranged from their homes, conference rooms in coworking spaces in Manhattan and Brooklyn, a public library, and one school. I traveled

as far as Valley Stream, outside Queens, Pelham Bay in the Bronx, and Bushwick in Brooklyn to conduct interviews and a video recall session with them. I facilitated the focus groups in a conference room in a coworking space in midtown Manhattan, as that was most central location to participants, and I collected some additional data by email.

Role of Researcher

In accordance with Ochs and Capps (2001) and Souto-Manning (2014), I served primarily as a conversation partner in the interviews and focus groups. I conducted all semi-structured interviews and video recall sessions, and I moderated the focus group and dyad meetings. While I prepared questions for a semi-structured critically emancipatory and participatory focus group, during introductions, teachers created an affinity space (Kohli, 2012; Varghese et al., 2019), and my participation diminished to be more passive—I asked few questions and teachers persisted, over a course of two hours, to answer all focus group protocol questions, conversationally. In retrospect, going back to the pilot study focus group and my learnings from teachers as a consultant in the PKTPP, teachers had given me access to the informal but systematic methodology known as "kitchen table conversations" (Lyiscott et al., 2021). According to Madriz (1997), there is a "long history of [such] 'no name' feminist and womanist practices—'exchanges with mothers, sisters, neighbors, friends'" often not documented in the research methodology literature (as cited in Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 897).

During individual interviews, my role was neither passive nor interventional, as I took a "critical discursive stance" (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 174), which meant that I asked probing questions in cases where it seemed participants were not imagining alternate possibilities to their named realities. During the focus groups, teachers served this role in questioning one another's commentaries and ideas. Despite my careful design, there were challenges including the power hierarchies inherent in my identity as a White scholar conducting research with Teachers of Color and the fact that many of the teachers

who volunteered for this research study knew me as a test preparation consultant. Thus, my words tended to have an outsized influence, especially during individual interviews, on participants' responses and the language they used to couch their experiences. As will be discussed below, I take this up as a point of focus in my analysis of data and findings.

Ochs and Capps (2001) describe how, theoretically and ideally, conversation partners share a range of participation levels in narrating stories. Sometimes conversation partners "take over" (p. 31), and sometimes they are much more passive. My role and the role of co-participants across interactions varied, and I was particularly cautious in intruding on teachers' narratives as I facilitated our conversational interviews. My positionality served to sometimes re-instantiate whiteness, particularly given that I am known in the New York City ECE community as a test preparation developer. This was mitigated somewhat as I also conducted member checks and a one-on-one video recall session (described below) at the end of the study.

Critical whiteness. Approaching this study, I was aware that naming my white privilege was insufficient (Lensmire et al., 2013) for me as a White scholar to engage ECE Teachers of Color in race critical conversations about the ways in which they experience testing and certification as racially biased. It was important to balance my solidarity with teachers and conviction that White scholars must contribute to the body of research on the effects of structural racism on teacher certification with teachers' descriptions. I was actively aware of and seeking to go beyond my white privilege in a constant self-reflexive process of noticing when I was protecting or perpetuating whiteness discourses. And yet, there are still occasions, as can be seen in contrasting interview data with focus group data, where my White positionality deterred teachers from openly criticizing tests and other certification experiences as racially biased. Though I was deeply respectful of my participants, expecting to draw on their brilliance as I interviewed them, there are moments in the interviews where I, as a conversation partner, reproduced and protected whiteness (Picower, 2009).

Picower (2009) theorizes how White preservice teachers actively protect whiteness in service of the protection of their own identities and, though her focus is White pre-service teachers, parallels to White teacher educators can be made as well. This is certainly true both in how I position myself and how the teachers position me in interviews. Though teachers view and position me as a conspirator (Love, 2019)—something evidenced by their creation of an affinity space during the focus group—there were moments when we demurred to test preparation and my role as a consultant without questioning the nature of that role or the problematics of my positioning within it. In analyzing these data, I notice a disturbing lack of critique of the tests, despite my efforts to make the space welcoming to such critique. Thus, in data analysis and reflection on the data collection methods, I engage Picower's research to examine the stages of the slow and stubborn undoing of my protection of whiteness—my personal whiteness abolitionist project, if you will.

I also position myself in a constant state of becoming (Emdin, 2017), wherein it is possible to engage my enlightenment-based notions of development with a race critical lens. As the project to dismantle and abolish whiteness is an ongoing one, I am always transforming in my own critical meta-awareness of how *and why* I perpetrate whiteness despite my efforts to undo it.

Participant Selection

Because of the nature of my past and current consulting, I have a network of hundreds of ECE professionals in New York City. Through that network, I sent a recruitment email asking strong teachers who self-identify as Women of Color or women whose primary childhood language was not English and who are pursuing certification to volunteer to participate in the study. The recruitment email began with a general survey that included an option to volunteer for interviews (see Appendix B). While data from the

general survey was collected, it was not analyzed for purposes of this qualitative study and will be used in future mixed methods analysis. One hundred thirty-nine teachers completed the survey, and 16 teachers who qualified based on my criteria volunteered to be interviewed. Following my accepted IRB protocol, I selected the maximum of 10 teachers based on a combination of purposeful and random selection that included an initial screening call to confirm eligibility, teachers' specific self-identification preference, and their preferred pseudonyms, which are used in all references to the teachers in this study.

Cee, Destiny, Maria, and Precious (all names are pseudonyms) were immediately selected, because they had six or fewer years of experience. Of the remaining 12 teachers, Barbie and Shopno were immediately selected, because their primary home language was Garifuna and Bengali respectively. In addition to Maria, these two teachers added important multilingual perspectives to the study. I used a random name selection tool to draw names for the remaining teachers. After conducting screening calls to review informed consent and confirm eligibility, one of the four volunteers whose name had been drawn was determined to not be eligible for participation according to my selection criteria. When using the random name selection tool, I had drawn all names and recorded their order so that each alternate had an ordinal position. I screened the next alternate on the list and she was confirmed to be eligible. The final four randomly-selected teachers, Faye, Joy, Mercedes, and Miesh had seven or more years of experience teaching ECE, and spoke English as their first language. Together, these teachers represented a demographic range in terms of years of experience, age, race, and/or ethnicity and status as multilingual, and they lived in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, or Queens.

In order to maintain this study's focus on the experience of licensure test failure in relation to the certification tests, the primary criterion was that teachers have met all educational requirements for certification except tests. Since the term "minoritized" is not in the popular discourse, I asked teachers in the recruitment survey if they self-identified

as a Woman of Color, and in the process of screening teachers to be included in the study and in the first interview, I confirmed how they identified racially and/or ethnically. One limitation of this study is that there was less representation of multilingual teachers, Latina teachers in particular, than would have been ideal. However, the contrast of experiences among participants provided insight into how teachers uniquely frame their experiences using the CRT lens and CNA analysis.

Table 3.1. *Teacher Demographics*

Pseudonym	**Racial and/or Ethnic Self-identification**	**Immigrant**	**English was home language**	**Years of Experience**	**Certification Status by December 2020**
Faye	Jamaican	Yes	Yes	Seven or more	Not certified
Mercedes	Black	No	Yes	Seven or more	Certified
Cee	African American	No	Yes	Less than seven	Not certified
Precious	Woman of Color or African American	No	Yes	Less than seven	Certified
Destiny	Caribbean American or African American	No, 2.0	Yes	Less than seven	Certified
Barbie	Garifuna	Yes	No	Seven or more	Not certified
Maria	Dominican and African American	No, 2.0	No	Less than seven	Not certified
Shopno	Bangladeshi	Yes	No	Seven or more	Not certified
Joy	African American	No	Yes	Seven or more	COVID-19 emergency certification
Miesh	Biracial or Black	No	Yes	Seven or more	Not certified

All participants completed informed consent forms that were created for Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix C). The form included an opportunity for participants to elect whether or not to participate.

Data Collection Methods

Based on my experiences with teachers in the field, a large body of research describing teachers' experiences of test failure, pilot study data, and literature on narratives (Ochs & Capps, 2001) and counter-narratives (Solórzano & Yosso (2002), I expected teachers to tell both majoritarian narratives and counter-narratives. In order to elicit a range of such narratives, I conducted a series of three in-depth narrative interviews (Seidman, 2012) (Appendices D, E, and F) with each participant. In the final interview, teachers reflected on their overall experiences and problematized their negative experiences in greater depth (Souto-Manning, 2014). Often teachers did not frame tests as explicitly racist; in anticipation of this, some probes and questions were used to address the interaction of how they identify racially and their intersectional minoritizations as experienced through certification test failure. In most cases, this strategy served to destabilize teachers' perpetuation of majoritarian narratives. "While not restricted to any topic in particular, narratives of personal experience typically report human events that touch our lives" and often "impinge on the well-being of the tellers or those about whom they care" (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 34). Thus, for purposes of this study, CNA provided a dynamic research analytic tool to enable analysis of the dialectical tension between participants' counter-narratives and majoritarian stories as presented in their conversational narratives in interviews and the one focus group. Interviews allowed me to analyze what individual teachers consider important and what they think about certain parts of their narratives. The focus group allowed me to analyze,

alongside the teachers, their mutual narratives, and it provided a modality for teachers to treat test failure as an institutional rather than an individual problem.

Focus groups (Appendix G) provide added benefits and risks to participants. The added benefit was the opportunity to co-create narratives of their experiences and definitions of teacher quality. Sharing experiences is a powerful tool for challenging oppressive myths that tests are objective and represent teacher quality. However, I could not guarantee that focus group participants would protect one another's confidentiality. To protect against this risk, we discussed issues of confidentiality at the beginning of the focus group session, and participants were reminded that they could avoid topics they were not comfortable sharing with the larger group. Taken together, data collection methods reflect the content and analysis needs of the study, as well as a need to keep my positionality in conversation with the data and findings. Below is a detailed description of data collection methods. Appendix H provides a summary of how my data align to the research questions, how they were analyzed, and how I guarded against validity threats in my data collection and analyses.

Interviews

In this study, I sought to elicit individuals' experiences of the tests and their reflections on the same, and thus employed a series of three one-on-one interviews with each of the 10 participants, modeled from Seidman's (2012) three in-depth interviews. This phenomenological approach to interviewing emphasizes the telling of experience and understanding related experiences to personal history, aligning well with the CRT framework and CNA methodology of the study. Moreover, I valued teachers' individual narration to countering the massive silencing of their voices created by the tests and institutional racism. Furthermore, Seidman's final interview provides opportunities for participants to reflect on their experiences, which can support teachers' counter-narrations and deepening critical meta-awareness. Beginning with a focused life history

(Appendix D), moving to an interview regarding the details of teachers' professionalization (Appendix E), and concluding with an interview that facilitates teachers' reflection on their experiences (Appendix F), the interview strategy provided a construct for (1) eliciting teachers' culture and historical life context, (2) learning about what the teachers emphasize as important, and (3) providing a separate context in which teachers can reflect on their experiences in the third interview.

Table 3.2. *Timing and Length of Interviews*

Pseudonym	**Duration (in minutes) and Dates of Interviews**			
	#1	#2	#3	Total Duration
Faye	67	118	102	287
Mercedes	51	101	92	244
Cee	95	98	101	294
Precious	68	87	76	231
Destiny	100	60	78	238
Barbie	89	98	96	283
Maria	68	76	112	256
Shopno	171	139	149	459
Joy	74	65	82	221
Miesh	79	107	96	282

In the interviews, teachers shared a wealth and depth of experiences that would not have been possible in a larger group setting. In the first interview, consistent with the goals of CNA, I asked teachers to identify how they identify as a person and what, if any, minoritizations they think are important to their identity. Questions such as "Would you say that there are any aspects to your identity that are the basis for other people to treat you differently?" and "How have you experienced that treatment in school over the years?" allowed participants to unveil how structures of injustice manifested in their schooling experiences. I also briefly touched on teachers' history with testing prior to teacher certification. In the second interview, I asked questions related to teachers' experiences with the certification exams and their definitions of teacher quality.

Questions such as “Pick a time when you faced a specific challenge with taking tests and/or exams” and “Describe your experience of those challenges and how you addressed problems you encountered” helped me elicit narratives that the teachers considered to be important that also demonstrated their strengths, countering official deficit notions of quality. I began to ask teachers to define teacher quality. I asked them as well what is a time they questioned their abilities as teachers. I also structured questions in a way that supported teachers to position their intersectional self-identification as a strength, asking questions such as “In what ways does your experience of _____ impact how you see yourself as a strong teacher?” In the third interview, we focused more on reflections on their teaching quality in light of policy requiring certification. They were given ample opportunity to question and critique existing structures, including regulations that narrowly determine their supposed lack of quality. These data enabled me to span the breadth of experience, agency, and structure required to complete the CNA.

The primary data are based on “conversational narratives” (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 3) that take place in each of the interviews. Conversational narratives are important to the extent that they allow for individuals to probe into and inquire about their own and others’ experiences where “conversational interaction realizes the essential function of personal narrative—to air, probe, and otherwise attempt to reconstruct and make sense of actual and possible life experiences” (p. 7). According to Souto-Manning (2014), “through conversational narratives individuals can concretely start questioning their own realities and identifying the socio-ideological influence of systemic and institutional discourses on their beliefs and practices” (p. 161).

My role was to ask questions, but my presence in the conversation gave me the status of co-narrator with the teachers, despite my positionality as a White researcher, so my role was not neutral. Ochs and Capps (2001) and Rymes (1997) demonstrate how the interviewer can and will provide the role of conversation partner, but they do not explore the racialized implications of co-narration. Rymes, however, shows in her research, as

cited by Ochs and Capps (2001), that peers are often most effective in probing one another. This proved true in the focus group as well. My positionality as a White researcher impacted interviews, creating limitations in how teachers would position their frustration with certification. Given limitations, my probes were sometimes ineffective compared to more organic probes teachers used with one another in the focus group. In particular, I noted that teachers' interest in highlighting their teaching quality seemed to have been impacted by their desire to prove to me, a White woman, and the audiences to whom I would write, that they were, indeed, qualified. This is a known limitation, since I lack important shared experiences with the Teachers of Color in this study. Despite the established trust that I have with many of them, these teachers chose to emphasize their assets in individual interviews, even when given opportunities to describe tests as racist; in the focus group interview, they were more openly critical of the whole system of ECE and did imply that this system is racist and culturally biased.

Whether tacit or purposeful, teachers' choices about what to share in different contexts telegraphed to me ethical guardrails for my representation of them. Citing the critical whiteness journal, comparing the individual interviews to the focus group interviews, and engaging in analysis of the video recall session, in my analysis, I will pinpoint how teachers' counter-narratives were impacted by their and my changing positionality in various "co-telling" moments throughout this research study. Despite known limitations, I leveraged our shared witness to the absurdity of testing to elicit teachers' counter-narratives that were appropriate to our shared transracial space.

Understanding the limits of my positionality, I took up what Souto-Manning (2014) calls a "critical discursive stance" (p. 174), which means I avoided "telling them" the issues that I think are critical and instead sought to "dialectically uncover the larger discourses ... framing their personal narratives" (p. 174). Like Souto-Manning, my goals are "problematizing issues instead of accepting them, asking questions and seeking to change unfair practices" (p. 174).

Focus Group and Dyad

I planned the fourth formal interview to be a 120-minute video-recorded focus group with all participants; however, after several iterations of scheduling, what was most convenient for seven of the teachers did not work for the other three. Since it was impossible to accommodate everyone's schedule, after consulting advisors, I opted for one video-recorded focus group with seven teachers and one video-recorded dyad. One teacher, Shopno, the only South Asian immigrant teacher, could not participate in any of the available sessions. After multiple attempts to accommodate her schedule, I moved forward with the focus group and dyad sessions with the other nine teachers. As will be analyzed in Chapter IV, her intersectionally minoritized experiences were significantly different from those of other teachers in this study; therefore, her absence, though not ideal, likely enhanced the affinity and intimacy that formed across the women of African American, Afro-Latina, and Caribbean descent in the focus group and dyad.

The focus group was imperative for answering the research questions, especially with CNA. After teachers had shared and reflected on their individual experiences, it was important to bring all teachers together to problematize the teacher certification exams. The focus group provided many contrasts, not just in how teachers responded in a collective affinity space, but also in how the presence of other teachers with similar experiences destabilized and/or strengthened the certainty that they expressed in individual interviews. Most importantly, it drew attention to the fact that test failure is not an individual issue—a problem of the individual—but a collective issue—and therefore a systemic issue.

The focus group interview also gave me the opportunity to triangulate data, and it provided rich discursive data on how teachers co-configure such knowledge, as "interactional practices are central to the narrative process" (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 55). Following the individual interviews, I codified (Freire, 1970/1993; Souto-Manning, 2010, 2014) focus group questions that cut across teachers' generalized experiences of the

exams in hopes of producing new areas of problem-posing and solutions to the problems of tests. These questions intended to serve as a conversational guide; teachers' responses from the outset were comprehensive and complex, deeming a semi-structured approach extraneous. In contrast, the dyad interview followed a more explicit protocol.

As anticipated, the focus group and dyad, having been designed for high co-participation, invited high levels of "co-telling" (Ochs & Capps, 2001). In accordance with Ochs and Capps's dimensional analysis of conversational narratives, the focus group provided an important context for teachers to share narrations of their experiences, their problem posing, and their problem solving as well: "When an interlocutor relates an experience, the experience becomes the object of public discourse" (p. 55). This launching of a public discourse provided the thrust of the focus group interview where participants shared responsibility for "tellership" (p. 24) and co-narration. In fact, after the first hour, the co-telling became so dense that I divided the group into two conference rooms so that all participants would have ample opportunity to share, video recording both sets of interactions with two separate cameras that were already running.

During co-telling events, "interlocutors can display relatively high involvement in a conversational narrative *vocally* through utterances and *nonvocally* through culturally appropriate eye contact, head moves, body orientation towards the speaker, or expressive facial and somatic reactions" (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 26). Through analyzing moments of co-narration focus group audio and video data, I illuminate teachers' co-construction of the problem of certification testing. More importantly, I used these highly "tellable" events to note "emotional hot points" (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2009) across teachers' narratives and experiences, helping me identity what was most commonly critical to teachers in this study. According to Cahnmann-Taylor et al. (2009), emotional hot points include "heightened language" (p. 2548) in the data and "by using techniques from poetry and the dramatic arts" it is possible to draw attention to matters of great significance to research participants. While I did not create poetic trans/cripts as the authors in the

original study did, I drew on my resources and experience as a language arts teacher to identify such places in the transcripts, as will be discussed as I explain my analysis below. Also, seeing how teachers supported and/or questioned one another in their narrations helped me to imagine the times of justice-seeking future research that would best serve other participants impacted by the same or similar problems in the future.

The focus group and dyad, unlike the individual interviews, were video recorded in order to demonstrate the non-verbal aspects of interaction amongst the teacher group. This was appropriate for several reasons. The focus group was mainly concerned with how teachers co-construct the problem of certification through interaction, and the rules and shifts in interaction are often non-verbally communicated (Ochs, 1979; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Rymes, 2016; Varenne & Cotter, 2016). Moreover, without video data, I would have been at a loss in two ways. First, I would be distracted from facilitating the focus group while trying to capture in observation notes the non-verbal displays important to answering the research questions. Both Ochs (1979) and Jordan (1993) have noted how clumsy note-taking can be as a method of recording non-verbal interaction. According to Ochs (1979), "the physical constraints on notetaking reduce the quality and quantity of nonverbal context captured" (p. 52). Thus, video clips and "snippets" are important in my rich corpus of data demonstrating not just what teachers say in counter-narrating experiences, but also *how* they co-create their narratives. Thus, I analyzed the non-verbal interactional content of videos to better understand how teachers take up or dismiss different conversational narratives.

Another benefit of using the focus group and video transcripts to complement the individual interviews is the context it would provide for a final, individual member checks with participants. As described below, these "video recall sessions" (Erickson, 2006, p. 185) encouraged participants to speak back to moments in the video that were narratively rich. Using the medium of video in the context of the video recall session would provide a concluding source of data, co-narration, and analysis, and it would offer

teachers the opportunity to revise any of their former thoughts and analyses regarding their experiences, serving as a final member check.

This study could be conducted with all focus groups, but it would be more time-consuming for participants and, as stated above, would detract from highlighting teachers' experiences one by one, which is particularly important given the fact that ECE Teachers of Color are often silenced. Given the nature of the study as designed, only one focus group meeting was conducted, and the dyad was used a make-up meeting for that.

Audio and Video Transcripts

I have a total of 30 individual interview audio recordings, three video-recordings from the focus group and dyad, and eight audio recordings from the individual video recall sessions (Erickson, 2006), described below. One teacher did not complete the video recall session because she did not participate in the focus group, and another teacher who did participate in the focus group, due to time constraints, completed her video recall session as part of her third individual interview.

Video-recorded focus group data were transcribed according to conventions for recording verbal and non-verbal activity together (Ochs, 1979; Varenne & Cotter, 2006). A private transcriptionist, who signed a non-disclosure agreement made available to all participants, created rough "words only" transcriptions for 10 individual interviews, and I transcribed all others. In addition, using emotional hot points (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2009) in the rough transcripts and audio recordings, I created an additional layer of transcription for the most emotionally salient parts of the individual interviews and video recall sessions. Ochs and Capps's (2001) transcription rules for conversational analysis (see Appendix I) provided enough description, such as long pauses and wait time, without putting too much emphasis on elocutionary style, keeping my focus on participants' words rather than style of delivery.

To break down the video into manageable segments, I followed Erickson's (2006) "Type I" procedure for Whole-to-part analysis (p. 183) to capture interactional content. This six-step process begins with reviewing the film and taking "the equivalent of field notes" (p. 183), which include verbal and non-verbal activity. Next, I watched the video again, this time creating a specific timeline of shifts in conversational patterns, including how intensely participants listened to one another, and major topics of conversation, including emotional hot points. Then, as planned, I went in-depth with one section of conversation where there was the most sustained engagement across participants and continued this process until all sustained engagements were recorded. Before making final selections for video to transcribe, I conducted "video recall sessions" (Erickson, 2006, p. 185) with participants, during which time I asked them, "What were you thinking and feeling during this moment?" and discussed their responses. Based on this final member check, I initially selected the audio-visual data for transcription from the focus group.

As Ochs (1979) has noted, verbal and non-verbal behavior is often strangely compartmentalized in video transcribing, so "paraphrasing" key moments helped me see non-verbal and verbal activity as coordinating with each other. To do this, I used methods developed by Varenne and Cotter (2006), which include taking thumbnails of visual highlights with the equivalent of long captions underneath the video frame. For example, one thumbnail they use—taken from a live labor and delivery they attended—is selected from a 33-second clip, and the accompanying prose "transcript" is 116 words including audio-visual details such as "the comment 'because [the mother] is a doctor,' said as the anesthesiologist has faced Cotter, appears at a time when the doctor appears to be waiting for the nurse to finish rearranging pillows and sheets" (p. 89). While focus group visual detail would be less active, I created similar but shorter paraphrases capturing audio and visual data together in the same prose-based transcript, renaming screenshots of each thumbnail according to paraphrased themes.

Member Checks

To the extent that member checks further explicate the data and create new conversations that inform the study, member checks are considered a source of data. I conducted brief member checks at the beginning of the second and third interviews, asking clarifying questions based on prior interviews. I also used the life history format to clarify relevant events as we moved through the process. The video recall session allowed me to member check the focus group experiences and served as a culminating event to locate teachers' positioning relative to collective counter-narratives expressed during the focus group. I also sent transcripts with summaries and highlights to teachers for their records, with a small percentage of teachers reading and responding directly to them. Finally, I conducted specific member checks as needed during the analysis phase. If I could not confirm a claim within the existing member checks and data sources, I contacted the teacher, summarized the finding, and made notes on their responses. Member checks for the last individual interview were conducted during the video recall session and by phone for the teacher who did not participate in the focus group.

Video Recall Sessions

Following the review of focus group video, and before in-depth analysis began, Erickson (2006) recommends a "recall session" (p. 185) with individual participants to review salient video content and ask them to "remember what he or she was thinking and feeling during the event" (p. 185). This served as a final member check and provided teachers the opportunity to continue to reflect on and counter-narrate their experiences and further develop their interpretations of these experiences. This type of depth responds to Dixson and Rousseau's (2005) call to subject our research to the full explanatory power of CRT. Instead of reporting one-dimensional tellings, this research provided multiple opportunities for teachers to think and rethink, or narrate and counter-narrate their experiences. This session also provided a complement to the third one-on-one

interview where teachers had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. These sessions were treated like a fifth and final interview, confirming and synthesizing across teachers' experiences. They were audio-recorded and transcribed in the same manner as the other one-on-one interviews.

Additional Data Sources

Teachers volunteered additional documents and other sources of data that they deemed critical to their teacher certification test experiences. This included score reports, testing histories, screenshots of Facebook posts, and advertisements for NYC's PreK for All. According to my third pilot study, a sharing culture (Graeber, n.d.) is important to the development of teacher networks and self- and peer-empowerment to prepare for and problematize teacher certification testing (Baker-Doyle & Petchauer, 2015). These other sources of data were considered both from the angle of how larger discourses impacted local events of teachers seeking certification (macro-to-micro) and how local narratives were constructed differently and/or in opposition to the wider discourse (micro-to-macro). Such data sources were used to determine how discourses from official and unofficial documents compare with the conversations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Fairclough, 2010) and conversational narratives among teachers.

Critical Whiteness Journal

As stated above, this project necessitated a constant interrogation of how my whiteness impacted the project and my interpretation of it. First, I had to be aware of how power influenced my interactions with teachers. The scholar Michelle Fine (2016) has warned that researchers cannot treat the lives of vulnerable adult populations, such as poor and intersectionally minoritized groups, as "low hanging fruit." In other words, this study was conducted on terms important to participants. Also, because of my positionality as White and from the working class but currently middle-class, I am

particularly susceptible to believing and/or perpetuating the narrative myth of a meritocracy. In particular, I have used the development of my own dominant American English repertoire (Paris, 2012) in service of my own upward mobility (Stanford, 2016).

Despite my well-meaning, liberal intentions, my justice-seeking stance can and does have colonizing effects (Dominguez, 2017). However, as stated in Chapter I, it is impossible to erase myself as I ally with a project to abolish whiteness, and I believe it is important for White scholars to engage in CRT. One of the chief hazards of ignoring my race is the perpetuation of whiteness through the unacknowledged privileges that whiteness confers on those like me who identify as or are identified as White. Thus, a race evasive approach threatens the important anti-racist work to which I must contribute. To address the possible pitfalls of my doing this research from this positionality, I maintained a critical whiteness journal (CWJ) throughout data collection and during my analysis. The CWJ includes my reflections and reflexivities about how I see race and the normalization of whiteness impacting data and analysis. Drawing on research on critical whiteness (Jupp et al., 2016; Leonardo, 2009; Picower, 2009) and CRT I use the CWJ to call into question hidden norms that impact teachers' experiences of the tests. I also used it to prompt conversations with my critical colleague for comments and suggestions.

Fieldnotes

Simple fieldnotes comprise a relatively small set of data in my data record, essentially serving as a companion to my experience of each of the individual interviews, the focus group interview, and the video recall session following the focus group. The purpose of my fieldnotes was to help me flesh out the contextual tensions between macro discourse and teachers' individual agency. Fieldnotes were purposefully limited, as I sought to train my researcher sensibilities and attention in this study onto the teachers' perspectives rather than my perspectives. However, my perspective offered a point of contrast, a place to recognize macro discourses in play for comparison to teachers' actual

narratives, and a way to track my experience of the development of teachers' narratives and reflections across data collection.

There are abundant examples of fieldnotes in the educational research methodology and ethnography literature. For this study, I used a format modeled by Bogdan and Biklen (2007). This format complements conversational narratives in interviews, because it is narrative-driven as well, but it includes a strong emphasis on setting the scene. This is important to my study; since there was no visual or descriptive content to describe anything happening outside of the actual interview, fieldnotes then provided an adequate description of the setting. I also used the fieldnotes to note if and where I developed deficit perspectives of teachers in the study, further explored in the CWJ.

Macro Discursive Data

Through CNA, I examined how ideologies impact teachers' everyday experiences through a careful examination of their conversational narratives in the context of the larger discursive environment. Given the time I spent with each participant (less than 10 hours), I needed to quickly identify which larger discourses most impacted their everyday experiences. I provided space and time in the interviews to solicit examples of documents, media, and other discursive data that reflected their views of their experiences. These data, along with anything mentioned or shared by participants from the larger discourses surrounding ECE teacher professionalization, provided a rich source of macro discursive data and ensured a range of examples from which I drew. I tracked such documents as well as when participants indexed (Rymes, 2016; Silverstein, 1976) such discourses in the fieldnote record. In the next section, I describe how I analyzed data across the research project in ways that centered teachers' experiences with and knowledge about certification tests and teaching quality.

Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis in this study was to examine teachers' use of conversational narratives, including counter-narratives and the development of the *critical* narrative analysis of their experiences in the context of dominant or institutional discourses. Consistent with CNA (Souto-Manning, 2014), data analysis began during the interviews, as participants and I engaged in ongoing, informal analysis throughout the course of data collection. In order to probe teachers' responses, I reviewed transcripts, fieldnotes, and recordings prior to each interview, homing in on questions for deeper collaborative analysis with the teachers. In the focus group and data, teachers co-created critical counter-narratives that thus enabled their collective critique of existing measures of teaching quality. Following collection of all data, I engaged in deeper levels of analysis, centering what teachers prioritized in interviews, connecting the micro or experiential narratives to larger, dominant narratives, and finally seeking to answer research questions broadly and systematically. Throughout analysis, I consulted the fieldnotes and CWJ as secondary tools to "triangulate" data and my analysis. A breakdown of how data were used for analysis can be found in the methods crosswalk in Appendix H.

Reflexive Analysis: Ongoing Conversations with the Researcher Self/ves

After rough transcriptions were developed from each audio-recorded interview, I used Ochs's (1979) theory of transcription and Ochs and Capps's (2001) transcription rules (see also Appendix I) to finish detailed transcriptions of focal points in each interview. This provided an additional layer of analysis (Green et al., 1997) following the initial CNA that I co-created with teachers.

As I listened to audio-recordings and resolved rough transcripts with details from each interview, I used my fieldnotes and CWJ to identify places where my own sense of the evolving narratives was most disrupted and unclear. I memoed (Dyson & Genishi,

2005) from this review of fieldnotes and the CWJ, both to deepen the CNA and continue examining the ways in which my whiteness impacted the research study and my analysis of it. I noted when I was drawn into believing a majoritarian discourse as opposed to the counter-narratives as told by participants and, in some cases, moments when participants and I partnered in the protection of whiteness (Picower, 2009), exploring possible explanations for this protection and how we did not disrupt such narratives. Moreover, I continued this ongoing questioning of when I doubted teachers' counter-narratives throughout the data analysis phase.

Critical Friend

Several times across my data collection and analysis, I met or called to consult a critical friend who identifies as African American and engages Black feminism and CRT as an ECE scholar. Through these conversations, I shared things that I was noticing as important in the data and my larger questions around language and representation of teachers in the study, and she helped me shape language I used in my analysis and descriptions of teachers. While it is impossible to resolve the tensions in this work and my positionality within it, this friend was invaluable in helping me notice, understand, and analyze participants' counter-narratives and their interpretation of their racialized experiences and identities. In further examining my research analysis and process, I have come to appreciate in particular her feedback to me during the individual interviews. As my whiteness dominated the space and initial analysis her situated perspective as a Black scholar and ECE educator served to create more space for teachers' individual narratives as I conducted life history interview. Ultimately, without this critical friend, my work in solidarity with Teachers of Color as represented in this study would not be possible.

Video Analysis

Drawing on Varenne and Cotter's (2006) conventions for analyzing a live birth event, I engaged in analysis of video data suitable to one-time video-recorded events such as my one-time focus group and dyad, attending to shifting positions of authority, and in this case, "co-telling" (Ochs & Capps, 2001). After video snippets had been selected (Erickson, 2006) and transcribed, I analyzed them based on individual participants in terms of their multiple narrative dimensions (Ochs & Capps, 2001; Rymes, 2016), such as tellership, tellability, and moral stance (Ochs & Capps, 2001). The categories provided by Ochs and Capps give a lens through which to understand both the co-constructing of narratives and the ways in which narratives are experienced through larger social constructions and institutional discourses (Souto-Manning, 2005).

From a CRT perspective, the dimensions allow for greater analysis of the ways in which teachers (1) shared authority in cocreating narratives; (2) resonated and did not resonate with one another's narratives; and (3) engaged morally in counter-narratives of teaching quality. Through this analysis of teachers' conversational narratives, I examined, in accordance with my research questions, how teachers constructed their narratives and counter-narratives, and, consistent with CRT, how they/we reproduced majoritarian stories and co-constructed counter-narratives. I also examined the extent to which the process of engaging in CNA altered teachers' definitions of professional achievement and construction of their experiences over time. This is consistent with Ochs and Capps's (2001) portrayal of narratives' being subject to change through dialogue rather than being coherent and linear. From that perspective, I also looked at how teachers experienced and expressed different types of agency (Souto-Manning, 2014) and oppression in the collective space. Below, I further detail how CNA as methodology and analysis was used in conjunction with the CRT theoretical framework.

CNA: Combining Critical Discourse and Narrative Analyses with CRT

Using CNA, I analyzed conversational narratives to determine where power structures are dominant in the perspectives of teachers and located instances where individuals and the group were developing agency in order to resist racist and neo-liberal ideologies operating against their interests. Since most of the data are from one-on-one interviews with participants, I analyzed these interviews first and foremost to look for what framing agencies and grammatical agencies (Manning, 2005; Souto-Manning, 2014) show up in the conversational narratives. Framing agency reflects people's moral and discursive ties to larger discourses and structures of power. Shown in statements such as "I can" versus "I can't," framing agency reveals shifts in participants' beliefs that they are positioned to enact change and the role of larger discourses in their experience of agency. Grammatical agency indicates that participants see themselves as active players in their experiences: instead of using the passive voice to indicate that they are being acted upon, participants express grammatical agency using active voice to describe their experiences. Souto-Manning (2014) gives the example of the difference between "*I wasn't given* an opportunity to learn and grow as a teacher" as an example of when participants are not experiencing personal agency versus, when they are experiencing personal agency, a teacher's saying, "We *decide* the important things for us to discuss and work on together" (p. 176, emphasis in original). I looked for instances of framing agency and grammatical agency as I moved through the one-on-one interview transcript data, and I engaged in comparative analysis across the interviews, focus group and dyad, and video recall sessions.

CNA considers that there might be tensions between local and individual agency and larger structures and/or strategies that maintain the status quo. Like Souto-Manning, I looked for how larger discourses shaped and impacted the narratives used by participants to describe their experiences. When particular norms, policies, laws, and/or organizations were introduced in conversation by participants, I looked for the particular frames used to

describe them. Moreover, to examine how teachers were drawing on narrative frames within the larger discourses, I engaged in additional comparative analyses of the documents and media teachers provided and discussed during the interviews in order to analyze how larger discourses impact teachers' individual and collective narratives.

After the interviews were analyzed from a discursive perspective, using CNA, I analyzed transcripts from the perspective of CRT, acknowledging that the two processes cannot possibly be separated. In this CRT analysis, the purpose of analyzing teachers' counter-narratives is to determine where participants are telling majoritarian stories and where they break off or resist the stories through the use of counter-narratives. I also examined which types of majoritarian discourses were repeated by several teachers and which discourses teachers were most likely to reject in their interviews. Finally, I analyzed expressions of framing and grammatical agency respective to their location in particular narrative conversations, drawing on additional evidence to account for why these shifts took place. Meanwhile, using my CWJ, I looked for ways that my own experiences entered the conversational narrative and influenced the discourse in the direction toward or away from majoritarian or counter-narratives. While I hoped to avoid swaying the discourse in a significant way, as a conversation partner asking probing questions (Souto-Manning, 2014), this could not be guaranteed and was sometimes necessary.

How Data Were Used to Answer Research Questions

The research questions addressed the dialectical nature of conversational narratives and counter-narratives, specifically the ways in which the teachers in the study negotiate competing interpretations of the problem of certification testing. This includes the ways in which teachers took up and/or resisted majoritarian interpretations of the challenges they faced. The main questions addressed broader issues, while sub-questions

addressed some aspect of the research questions and were not meant to be exhaustive. Also, data were used to answer research questions directly and through CNA.

The first main question, "How do intersectionally minoritized teachers who have experienced licensure test failure in New York State (NYS) define professional achievement in early childhood education?" was answered first, through specific interview questions spaced out in the study and designed to get different perspectives on teachers' definitions of quality, as well as address any sense that their definitions changed over time. For example, in the second interview, for comparative purposes, I solicited examples of experiences in the ECE setting in which teachers believed others were successful, and I asked for examples from their experiences in which they believed they were successful professionally.

To answer the first sub-question, "How do these teachers negotiate official definitions of qualified Pre-K teacher under Article 47 of New York City Health Code with their own understandings of what makes them qualified to teach?" I compared teachers' responses when they talked about their certification requirements as dictated by Article 47 with responses when they talked about their qualifications and achievements more broadly. I specifically looked for moments in the data when teachers seemed to be comparing competing definitions in conversational narratives and when they challenged the official definitions through more resolved narratives and counter-narratives. I also looked for changes over time, or for places where "new information" (Varenne, 2011) prompted teachers to redefine or renegotiate their definitions of professional achievement over the course of the data collection stage.

To answer the second sub-question, "How do these teachers respond to claims that they are not qualified because of licensure test failure?" I asked questions in interview two, such as "How have you talked to others about your licensure test experiences?" and "How have they responded?" I also asked if there have been any official consequences at work for their not being certified because of state examinations,

and, if so, how they responded to them. Consistent with CNA, I looked for ways in which (if any) official discourses influenced teachers' responses and conversational narratives around this question and critically analyzed how official interpretations of teachers' successes were or were not taken up by teachers in the study. In some cases, this was a non-issue or not critical for teachers in the study, but it was significant to most teachers.

The second main question, "How do intersectionally minoritized early childhood teachers who have experienced licensure test failure in NYS construct and/or co-construct knowledge about the problem of teacher licensure test failure?" was addressed in the second and third interviews, as well as in the focus group setting. To answer this question, I looked for self-reports of teachers describing how they had constructed knowledge about the licensure test problem with their colleagues in the past. To prompt memories of such experiences, I asked them to tell me how they had received help in the past, what sorts of questions they asked, advice that they gave, and what resources they used that were most helpful. Again, given the dialectical nature of the study's design, I looked for sites of confusion, tension, and/or difficulty as teachers explained their approaches to this problem.

Whereas individual interviews relied on teacher-reported co-narrations in the past, during the focus group, I asked questions that elicited teachers' "live" co-narrations and counter-narrations. Having the video transcript for the focus group allowed me to answer questions, not just about what teachers said to each other, but how their body language and physical positioning helped them to configure this problem and possible solutions, as well as how they encouraged one another in their solutions. I initiated discussion about certification testing by generalizing the most salient themes across their experiences based on individual interviews. Though I had prepared semi-structured focus group interview questions (see Appendix G), teachers engaged in a conversation following their introductions and answered all questions with very little prompting from me.

To answer the sub-questions from the second main question, (1) “What do these teachers see and experience as the local consequences of teacher licensure and testing policies in NYS?”; (2) “What solutions do these teachers collectively identify as important to solving problems with teacher licensure test failure on exams?”; and (3) ”How do these teachers construct and/or narrate their journeys experiencing failure and success?”, I examined teachers’ conversational narratives. I drew from focus group data and the video recall session. I attended to who is dominant in the conversations, and I looked for ways the discourses of successful teachers “travel” (Foucault, 1970/1981) into the discourses of teachers who are still experiencing licensure test difficulty, both in perpetuating and rejecting majoritarian discourses. Here, I reengaged the research literature on teacher licensure testing and affirming the strengths of Teachers of Color to help me interpret the ongoing nature of teachers’ problem-solving and agency related to certification exams. I also considered the ways in which majoritarian discourses and/or counter-narratives were privileged in teachers’ approaches to addressing the problems.

Emerson et al.’s (2011) approach to analyzing fieldnotes proved to be particularly useful in answering the final research sub-question, “How do these teachers construct and/or narrate their journeys experiencing failure and success?” These authors recommend that researchers sit down at the end of data collection and read all fieldnotes as they would a novel, so they should read, in chronological order, “in a matter of hours a record of events that took place over weeks and months” (p. 174) to establish a frame for recognizing how perceptions and explanations change over time. Through this process, I reviewed findings to critique earlier analyses and draw final conclusions.

Soundness of Research

Data analysis has been designed around the CNA imperative of zooming into particular details of life experience and zooming out to look at the tensions of the local

experience in relation to the broader discourses and policies that currently shape a particular problem in teacher licensure testing. I developed a design that includes member checks, including a video recall session and critical colleague check-ins, and I developed the CWJ with attention to both details and structural features of how teachers address this problem. An effective and "sound" study in this case would highlight teachers' counter-narratives and compare them to majoritarian narratives as they are woven into their problem solving. When I completed the final video recall session, it was important to probe into teachers' responses to ask, "Where do the recording snippets most align with what you think about your experience?" and "Is there anywhere that it is not quite right or [representative of] what you think?" "Why?" and "What would you change?" In working with the critical friend, I employed her comments to provide additional insights when I read back over the data as a corpus to locate additional salient narrative representations and/or alternate interpretations. Please see my crosswalk in Appendix H for how I responded to validity threats as I moved through the project.

Limitations

As discussed elsewhere, I am a private consultant in the field of New York State teacher certification. While my sampling was broad, it had conflicts in that my network is tied to supporting teachers who are continuing to seek to be certified. Thus, I drew from a pool of teachers who not only know (of) me in my consulting role but also remain invested in teacher certification. Out of all 10 teachers included this study, only one teacher does not plan to pursue her certification. Furthermore, all teachers in this study intend to stay in the profession. Therefore, teachers who left teaching because they did not pass exams were not included in this study. This means a certain level of criticism and experience of failure will be missing in this data set *a priori*. Moreover, despite my personal commitments to end existing high-stakes teacher certification measures, I can be

perceived as an advocate for testing due to my role. As analyzed in the following chapters, this did impact the way teachers narrated and/or reflected on their experiences regarding their certification to me. My whiteness also affected participant answers; as discussed in my positionality, because I do not share teachers' experiences, I could not commiserate or validate their experiences in the interviews and focus group.

Also, though the study is not designed as a case study, it is limited to the particular case of New York State teacher licensure and certification, and its specific rules regarding early childhood teacher certification. With a limited and qualitative sample of participants, this study does not claim generalizability, not even in New York State.

Chapter IV

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS

In this chapter, you will meet Faye, Mercedes, Cee, Precious, Destiny, Barbie,[1] Maria, Shopno, Joy, and Miesh (all pseudonyms selected by teachers), who were selected in March 2018 to participate in this study. All were practicing ECE teachers and uncertified when the study began. Destiny, Mercedes, and Precious became certified while actively participating in the study. In this chapter, I present data and analysis based on the individual interviews. I engage in critical narrative analysis (CNA) (Souto-Manning, 2014) of individual interviews to account for what, how, and why teachers accepted, rejected, resisted, or qualified prevailing narratives in their discussion of teaching quality and certification. The chapter concludes with my discussion of implications from teachers' individual themes, transitioning to overlapping themes, which I explore in Chapter V.

The 10 teachers in this study were selected semi-randomly from a list of 16 qualifying volunteers. In initial selection, I sought to gain a diversity of experiences in terms of age, years of experience, and racial and ethnic self-identification. Once that was established, I used a computerized random name tool to select the final group of 10 from among volunteers whose experiences seemed, broadly, to overlap. In this opening, I

[1]I use her preferred pseudonym, "Barbie," because this diminutive form of Barbara best reflects her trademark warmth, familiarity, and chattiness. Because *Barbie* has a negative connotation in the U.S., I use *Barbara* with permission for publication.

introduce teachers in their own words. I constructed the introductions from across individual and focus group transcripts using teachers' original language from their first individual interview, their focus group introductions to one another, or a combination of the two. Then, I proceed with presentation of findings and analysis.

Faye

> Everything for me is in Jamaica. That's what I consider my roots. Jamaica. My roots, I think, yes, are the most important parts of my identity. And as far as I know going back to my great grandmother she was born in Jamaica (laughs). Everybody is Jamaican. That's where I am from. That's where I have my beginning. That is where I have my educational background. I have made good strides here but it's all because of what was instilled in me back in Jamaica. For me I'm proud. I can't forget Jamaica.

Mercedes

> I'm a Black educated woman. An educator. My name is most important to me because I worked hard for it and I don't want it to be tarnished. So my name is most important to me, as a BLACK woman. My name is power to me. Because I have children so they associate that with me. If there's any negativity or positivity that's associated with my name—that reflects on them. I'm not supposed to be where I'm at—because of my background, because of my parents, and because I had every excuse to do the wrong thing. For me to be educated, have a master's degree, two bachelor's degrees, be ALMOST[2] certified, that means a lot 'cause I could've been anything and they would've been okay, because I had parents who were in prison. I was raised as a foster child with my grandmother and my aunt, but those things don't define me.

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[2]She was certified during the course of these interviews.

Cee

I am a female ... Black ... Teacher. I am a mother. A grandmother. And ... That's how I describe myself. I have been teaching since 2014. So, it's almost like four years. I absolutely identify strongly with my new teacher identity. I didn't always want to be a teacher. I started working in the education field as a family worker at a daycare and then I ... decided to take a child development class to help me, you know, with the students. I used to do the assessments for the kids when they come in. That was part of my job. So, I just wanted to know a little bit more about it, so I started a Child Development Associate program. Someone from PDI came to talk to my class about a new scholarship for the UPK program, and I applied for it. And I got in. And that was my beginning of teaching.

Precious

I'm a Woman of color. Very aggressive. Very authoritative. Passionate. Kind. Caring. Helpful. Always willing to learn. Being passionate is important to me because when I have a love for something, I make sure that I do my all. So, if there's something that I wanna learn, I'm gonna put a 1000% into it. And it's always good to have passion in everything that you do. Being helpful is also important to know about me. I always like to lend a hand and help anybody that needs help. As a Woman of Color, sometimes you face a lot of challenges. And I feel like in my life I sometimes come across those challenges, but I really don't let it discourage me, because I do have a very high self-esteem. I'm one that I don't look at the color of my skin on the outside; I'm a person that look at you from the inside.

Destiny

I'm family oriented. I think other people see me as this fun, outgoing person. In front of others I don't really show, like, I'm vulnerable. I'd, rather my family to see it. Everybody's like, "Oh my God, Destiny's so fun! And she's so outgoing and you know, we can come to her, for any advice or anything." And I guess, like, as long, if you're really close to me then you could see that vulnerability. Then I will show it. Even though I consider myself African American, I used to have problems growing up, because I would say I'm African American, but everybody knew I was Caribbean and my family came from another country. Americans who were born here would be like, "No, you don't fit in our circle like you're

not part of us." Going to BMCC was important to experience more diversity because I didn't want to be placed in just that one culture only.

Barbie

My close friends call me Barbie. I'm a 55-year-old early childhood educator. Giving back to my community is the most important aspect of my identity. I learned this value from my ancestors and their culture. When I arrived in the United States, I was three-and-a-half years old and did not speak English. Garifuna, the language of my people, is my first language. We identify ourselves through our language and our culture, because we were exiled. In the 1700s there was a war in St. Vincent, and my people lost the war. So, we were put on ships with a captain who was not Portuguese, not English, but actually spoke the native languages. We floated about until we arrived in Retalhuleu—off the coast of Honduras. So, people migrated down into Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Belize. My history is important. If you don't know who you are, you don't know where you're going to go.

Maria

I am hard working. I can procrastinate sometimes! But, overall, I have my goals set and get them done in a timely manner. I'm organized. I'm a professional, a teacher, a special education teacher. The most important part of my identity would be my passion for teaching, because it incorporates all aspects of me. My African descent identity is very important, because the community that I work with is usually people with different backgrounds. My dad is half African American and Dominican, and both my parents came from the Dominican Republic here, so for me, my first language was Spanish. I was placed in an English as a Second Language class, and I loved it. My experience plays a large role in me teaching because I'm able to identify myself with those parents, or with those children and relate to them and try to use that to also assist children.

Shopno

I don't have hijab because I'm Muslim but from my country religion perspective, it is not mandatory. This is our option, because I'm from South Asia, Bangladesh. We are priority Muslim country, but we are not

really that conservative. We have open option. If you comfortable, you could wear a hijab, you could wear long sleeves. I wear long sleeves. Of course, I pray, respect my values. I don't want people to just identify me only on one trait. Also, I don't say "I don't want people identify me in my hijab, that's why I'm not wearing hijab"—it's not like that. My culture is open, comfortable. I want to stay in community-based setting, because I am able to help people, especially with my language, Bengali, Urdu, and Hindi. I help administration think about how they identify people. I see those families, they going to identify different way, I just jump in and help.

Joy

I would describe myself as very creative and outgoing. Inquisitive when it comes down to learning more or what helps me to be a better teacher. I'll seek out different webinars or conferences that I can go to that will help me as an educator. Being creative is the most important part of my identity to me, because when you're creative you can kind of reach the children at a different level as opposed to it just being a teacher who just comes in and does the same thing over and over; you know how to change the day if you see it's not going the way YOU planned it. Like for example today, I pulled out some flour and baby oil and said "let's mix it" and we just mixed it together and they loved it. They wanted to take it home (laughs). I identify as African American. I am African American and Native American—my mother's grandfather was Native American.

Miesh

I'm a team player. I can seem happy on the inside when I'm not. If you are really close, you know how my moods move. I'm a mother, mostly, busy and very anxious about things; I don't like things to be left "not done." It's crazy because my nine-year-old child is going through the same thing. We are like perfectionists and when things do not go our ways, we give up on everything! You say, "We've made so many milestones to get where we are at?" That doesn't even matter. We are working to change that. I'm just an open-hearted person. Respectful. Educated. I have compassion and faith, and I'm just a regular person (laughs). In terms of my biracial identity, Mom is Puerto Rican, and my father is African American. I'm more comfortable with the term Black rather than African American, because my ancestors are from America.

Critical Narrative Analysis with Teachers in Individual Interviews

In this chapter, I employ CNA "to analyze [teachers'] counter-narratives, using the concepts of framing agency and grammatical agency" (Souto-Manning, 2019, p. 14). Attending to syntactical nuances in these conversational interviews, I draw attention to the ways in which racism, white supremacy, and other dominant discourses in the languages and actions of teachers influence how they construct their experiences of teacher quality and certification.

How Data Were Selected and Analyzed

Individual interviews comprise 46 hours and 35 minutes of audio-recorded data. This does not include any of the focus group data or the video recall session audio-recording. Given the sheer volume of audio recorded data, it is impossible to address everything that teachers and I discussed in the individual interviews. I thus sampled data for this chapter based on criteria that would allow me to reflect (1) teachers' range of experiences; (2) unique shifts in their grammatical and framing agency; (3) if, and if so, to what extent teachers' responses changed in criticality and race criticality over time; and (4) individual teacher emotional hot points (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2009). As a rule of thumb, if multiple teachers addressed the same issues with relative similarity, I preserved that data and analysis for Chapter V, where I analyzed themes that overlap across interviews. Considering together teachers' unique experiences and positioning alongside their collective challenges, counter-narratives, and recommendations for changes to certification, these factors weighed in all my decision-making of what I sampled below.

Due to constraints of space, given the large sample, I also made difficult decisions to eliminate emotional hot points (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2009) from the themes presented here, because they lacked the dimensions of criticality and/or race criticality that are a priority of this study. I selected the example below of how I analyzed data

primarily because it is illustrative of one such emotional hot point. It demonstrates the stakes teachers experience in seeking to become certified; it shows the collective experience I have had with many of the teachers as they journeyed through this process, since I knew most of the teachers before this study began; and it highlights how Precious worked her way through adversity. However, I didn't include this selection in broader analysis, because there was something more important that repeated across her individual interviews. On multiple occasions, Precious referred to the tests as a "noose" around her neck—though she rejected claims that tests were racist. Given the framing and concerns of this study, her unique ways of framing this aspect of her experience were prioritized. Thus, a powerful emotional hot point was dropped from broader analysis. I preserved it in this example to provide a fuller context for teachers' cycles of oppression and relief explored across Chapter IV themes.

Precious had completed a major roadblock to her certification, the Content Specialty Test (CST) in math, over the course of interviews, and she purposefully waited for the audio-recorded portion of our third interview to share the news with me. This is the only time a teacher waited to share good news in an interview, but it is an accurate representation of the shared excitement and relief that tends to follow when a teacher finally passes a difficult exam. Without question, this is the peak of emotional hot points in her interviews, as I transcribed below:

Gail: I wanted to (haughting) just get an update. Have you done anything else with your testing?

Precious: hhh (1.2)

Gail: and certification —

Precious: So::—

Gail: certification, yeah

Precious: (click clicks palm on her desk) º I passed the math º

Gail: (gasps in air) Ahh::HH^::

Precious: (Laughs)

Gail: (continues to scream and start to clap)

Precious: (Laughs) HeHEHEHE:HEHE (3.1)

Gail: (hollers) WHA^:! [

Precious: (Laughs) Yes! I'm finished with the math (laughs)

Gail: Oh my goodness!!!

Precious: And just waiting for the ELA

Gail: Breathes in again—

Precious: (Continues laughing) Gail, you just like me. I was in tears. I was screaming. I was ((indecipherable)) but YES (starts laughing more). Yes, when I saw it come in, you know they—I was like Oh my God—I get goose bumps when the email comes that — so I open it and I'm like "Okay, okay, okay." And when I saw pass^, I was like (starts laughing) I was like so excited. YES

Gail: Wo:w

Prior to transcribing interviews, I screened audio (Street & Heath, 2008) to identify emotional hot points (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2009) such as this, and then, in most cases, chose to either transcribe the words, pauses, and laughter or, in cases such as this, I transcribed selections in greater detail (Ochs & Capps, 2001) (See Appendix I), because they capture more of the emotionality as seen above.

Whether I transcribed in detail or with a focus simply on the language used, I nevertheless looked for the details that demonstrate teachers' sense of agency as depicted in their syntax. In the above selection, Precious demonstrates all the forms of grammatical and framing agency I analyze in this chapter. She uses grammatical agency, positioning herself as in control in sentences such as "I passed the math" and "I was screaming," while indicating less agency in the syntax of waiting: "I'm just waiting for the ELA" and "I get goose bumps." In terms of framing agency, Precious aligns herself somewhat with the larger notion that this is, in fact, good news. What is perhaps most

telling, though not unique from the perspective of this study, is that she does not frame herself as better at math because she passed the math test. There is no connection to her math knowledge and passing. Instead, the connection is to a larger shared understanding of relief.

Also, across this study, teachers sometimes used linking verbs to describe a state of their being, their identity, feelings, etc., which is technically neither an active nor passive construction—it also does not necessarily constitute a moral framing. This was also common in the excerpt above in statements such as "I'm finished with the math," "I was in tears," and "I was like so excited"; and it is common across excerpts analyzed below. While my focus of analysis is on grammatical and framing agency, I point out instances where teachers use linking verbs to describe themselves, because it allows me to pinpoint more carefully how their experiences have shaped, not only their sense of agency—leading to our collective understanding of how larger discourses about certification impact their daily lives—but also, how their sense of their *identities* comes to be shaped by these larger discourses too.

While this particular emotional hot point was eliminated from further analysis for purposes of this study here, as appropriate to this study's framing, I do employ teachers' emotional hot points in order, consistent with Souto-Manning's (2014) critique of critical scholarship, to locate what is critical to teachers instead of assuming if and in what ways systemic oppression impacts them on a daily basis. Thus, in sampling and analysis, I draw attention to the ways in which teachers have encountered racism, ranging from explicit encounters with white supremacy to more structural and subterranean racialized experiences, as expressed in Precious's depiction of the noose around her neck to be explored below.

Whether or not teachers in the one-to-one interview named racism plays on a host of factors raised in the literature review. Across this chapter and in subsequent ones, I engage in asking supplemental questions, including, "In what ways does my positionality

as a White scholar, test preparation 'consultant,' and daughter of the white working class who was raised to believe in American meritocracy, protect whiteness (Picower, 2009) in interviews?" It is worthy of noting, then, that Precious purposefully waited to share the news of her passing math with me, understanding that I would be excited too— thus highlighting a larger framing agency that passing is good, as tied to the shared discourses related to test preparation from which teachers drew on in the interviews with me.

Normative and Situated Morals at Work in Teachers' Narratives: Faye, Mercedes, Cee, Precious, and Destiny

Below, I engage in CNA of teachers' counter-/narratives[3] that represent significant uses of framing agency to demonstrate how teachers position their work as teachers and certification seekers based on "normative and situated morals" (Souto-Manning, 2019, p. 14). Despite the fact that many of these examples highlight teachers' lack of agency, teachers' use of framing agency—the ability to position themselves in alignment with their values—is an important way they re-establish equilibrium in the midst of difficult circumstances. In this section, I begin with CNA analysis of two narratives of classroom-based experiences to demonstrate how teachers' normative and situated morals drive decisions they make as teachers, and I end with CNA analysis of three narratives of teacher certification experiences to show how ECE quality discourses impact teachers' experiences. I conclude this section with broader analysis across these themes.

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[3]I use *counter-/narrative* to draw attention to the range of positions teachers take up in relationship to how they construct their experiences. This acknowledges that there are no clear binaries in rejecting or reproducing master narratives—though I use *counter-narrative* and *narrative* as appropriate.

Faye: "I can visit Africa but there is nothing there that I'll be able to relate to."

In the opening minutes of my first of three interviews with Faye, she invoked a Jamaican comedian in unequivocally divorcing herself from any sense of belonging to what other Jamaicans including Bob Marley would call the "Motherland" of Africa.

> Comedian Louise Bennett said you have to come from somewhere to be able to go back there. And for me, I was born in Jamaica. I can't go to Afri—I can visit Africa but there is nothing there that I'll be able to relate to.

Drawing on this comedian, Faye established a moral stance on the superiority of Jamaica while positioning herself as apart from the African diaspora. The theme of the superiority of Jamaica and, in particular, many of its colonial antecedents, resonated across most of her interviews and is central to how she demonstrated agency as an experienced teacher from Jamaica now seeking to become a certified ECE teacher in New York. In fact, her sense of pride in comparing her schooling and teaching in Jamaica to experiences with the same in the U.S. is summarized in her words, "I have made good strides here but it's all because of what was instilled in me back in Jamaica."

Faye almost always positions herself as an active agent in describing past experiences. Her use of framing agency in attributing her U.S. success to "what was instilled" in her in Jamaica, therefore, draws attention to her romanticization of Jamaica and even some of its continuing colonial ties. In comparing her experiences of assessment in Jamaica, Faye commends the "GC," the General Cambridge examination, a short form essay exam that was "sent back to London" to be marked when she was a high school student; and Faye attributes her failure on multiple-choice certification exams in the U.S. to her experiences with higher-quality open-ended assessments in Jamaica.

She also uses her sense that Jamaica is superior to powerfully critique complex systems of certification in New York. On multiple occasions, Faye expressed moral consternation over the fact that teachers cannot graduate with a degree and become certified, as is done in Jamaica, where "When you're finished, you're finished." When it

comes to UPK teaching, Faye also maintained a consistent moral stance that aligned her positive assessment of Jamaican education with her conservative educational values as a New York City's UPK teacher. Perhaps surprisingly, this included her subversion of Department of Education (DOE) standards when her UPK classroom began to serve as childcare each day at 3 p.m. Faye implements higher standards for her children between 3:00 and 3:30, which is the end of her workday, by preparing them for the DOE's gifted and talented test. In the excerpt below, she demonstrates framing agency regarding the constraints of a strictly monitored Creative Curriculum (Heroman, 2009) schedule until 3 o'clock each day.

> You don't want us to test these children, like on paper, but by the time we get to school by early October we are given these booklets for gifted and talented children for the parents to register them to go do the gifted and talented test…. Now there is no slot in what I do for the day to work with the kids on that because it's going to take more than 15 minutes in the morning to do it.

Early in this example, Faye uses framing agency—"there is no slot in what I do" —to contrast how she agentively works around constraints, demonstrating significant grammatical agency to show how she does this: "I spend my extra half an hour … from 3 [until 3:30] and I start working with them in the [gifted and talented] book." Thus, here and elsewhere, Faye's grammatically agentive identity served important functions in her depictions of herself as a high-quality teacher, allowing her to challenge frustrating norms that both reflect her Jamaican educational identity and, perhaps unwittingly, disrupt systemic racism in the gifted and talented system in the predominantly Black low-income Brownsville community where she teaches.

Despite her advocacy for these children and their families, Faye's sense of superiority is a motivating force and often lends to a deficit view of families. She complained that most parents do not work with the children at home and bemoaned free meals provided to children daily. A traditionalist, Faye values education and sees it as an opportunity for children to escape the cycle of welfare and poverty. Nevertheless, there is

often a waiting list to be accepted into her classroom, and families generally appreciate her firm rules balanced with warmth and care. I will return to Faye's moral alignment with the Jamaican system of education, as her opinions and experiences figure heavily in the focus group setting.

Mercedes: "It was like a bomb went off."

Mercedes, a Bronx native who grew up during the Reagan-precipitated crack epidemic (Alexander, 2020), serves as an important foil to Faye. In one interview, Mercedes, old enough to remember the crisis as it unfolded, describes a vast change.

> It was like you're in a community and everybody is taking care of each other. You're multicultural. You're in this person's house. This one's your friend, you're eating at this house, and *then it was like a bomb went off*, and the families were destroyed, and you couldn't go to this person's house because their parent was on drugs and … you see your friends, they're dirty, they're hungry, because their parents are on drugs and they don't have grandparents (emphasis added).

Mercedes's grammatical agency and situated framing employed here and throughout her interviews is some of the most complex recorded in this study, reflecting her complexity of experience, sense of belonging to her Bronx community, and empowerment to advocate for herself and others. Across interviews, she reflects her agency as someone irrevocably positioned by harm perpetrated by bureaucratic racism in the Reagan administration, and yet, she delights in the transformative work she does in her community and the fact that her early experiences do not "define" her. While she does not want to be defined by her circumstances, she draws deeply on them in order to create change.

In the excerpt above, Mercedes emphasizes a mixture of passive and active involvement, and importantly, a sense of identity that is neither passive nor active. Instead, using linking verbs and a second person plural "you," implying the third person "we" in short sentences such as "You're multicultural," Mercedes places herself in her

Bronx community, drawing attention to her commitment to the lives of children and families there. Neither wholly independent, nor lacking agency, she is happily situated in this community, where everybody takes care of one other, establishing counter-narratives to master-narratives regarding this crisis. Rather than position her actions as primary, she draws on linking verbs to situate her communal, familial identity as preeminent.

In addition to offering a striking contrast to deficit portrayals of communities such as this, Mercedes's counter-narrative positions the epidemic as happening to her community, and this is where her syntax and agency shift as she describes the beginning of the epidemic. Here, Mercedes positions herself as a passive, helpless viewer watching a scene unfold—"you see your friends, they're dirty, they're hungry"—and as one who also experiences consequences beyond the immediate trauma that has been produced. The crisis restricted her freedom: "You couldn't go to this person's house because their parent was on drugs." Mercedes's life history and its influence on her teaching on its own could be the sole focus of my dissertation, but for purposes here, her enduring commitment to her Bronx community is emphasized.

Like many teachers in this study, Mercedes's grammatical agency is most clearly employed when describing her teaching practices and her advocacy—for children, families, teachers, her children, and herself. She also uniquely shifts her sense of agency in order to draw attention to the power her students have to shape her identity. In describing how it is difficult to change as she gets older, Mercedes explains how children have become a resource for her in this regard.

> It gets tough as you get older because the children change, and you have to be able to change with them…. And that's one thing that ... helps me now. I have to do a lot of self-evaluation. Every year when I have a new group of children, I have to look at those children and see what their needs are. And then I have to look at myself and see how I can fulfill their needs. Or I will become unhappy.

I asked Mercedes how fulfilling the needs of children helps to fulfill her:

> It makes me such a way better teacher than I was the year before. Every year, I'll get a child that's the most difficult child, and I'll think it's the end of the world. And then over time, I see this child develop. And I see how that child has developed me.

In this example, Mercedes demonstrates the complexity of self-reflection that leads to wholeness. Instead of taking on a disposition that would lead her to blame the child, Mercedes effects grammatical agency, choosing instead to "see" the children in her class and what their needs are—serving to also help her stay fulfilled in the profession. As a result of her choices and actions, Mercedes is happier, becomes a better teacher, and develops personally and professionally as the child has "developed" her and her identity.

This vision she has for her students is employed in Mercedes's positioning of parents, too, even those who could be mislabeled as difficult. Explaining that teachers need to know about whether her students have "rough home lives," Mercedes, departs from a discourse that can be construed as deficit-based, saying she uses background information about the homelife to "understand why this child might act out." Knowing relationships within the home is also important to Mercedes as she chooses an active stance of supporting the child by supporting the family. Mercedes uses grammatical agency to state plainly how she responds to parents when this is the case: "I try not to judge the parent." Instead, she redoubles her efforts to connect with parents. For example, Mercedes had recently asked a parent, "Are you okay?" and she "broke down crying."

Examining Mercedes's counter-narratives in contrast to Faye, it is clear that her situated history positions her quality in terms of how she works alongside families. Faye cares, but through the lens of colonialist eyes, with judgment; Mercedes's care comes from a place of high expectations but without the moralizing frame that Faye uses. Both are products of their lived experiences, and both demonstrate agency working within and beyond their situated moral frames of reference. They both demonstrate aspects of quality, and yet Mercedes's conceptualization and enactment of quality is more sustainable and sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2014). When asked about her experiences of

good teachers, Mercedes demonstrated that she had learned and experienced this same kind of care in high school. “Teachers that care, like they’re nurturing, and they understand your situation and they don’t look at you as your situation.” Choosing to demonstrate this ethic broadly in her community-based teaching practice, Mercedes’s support of parents is one of her most important attributes as an excellent teacher. This theme echoes across all her interviews and is especially important in her final interview and focus group, which I return to in Chapters V and VI.

Cee: “I just learned to equate math with something that wasn’t a good feeling.”

As mentioned in the introduction, Cee has a new teacher identity, but her experiences with math are preventing her from becoming certified; and whereas some experienced teachers in this study leverage their experience to maintain teaching positions in more stable work environments, Cee’s lack of experience made her more vulnerable to changing requirements and lack of job stability as time passed and she remained uncertified; during our summer of interviews, she lost her job and was unemployed when school began in the fall.

Like many of the teachers in this study, as discussed in Chapter V, Cee has had difficulty with math since elementary school. After failing high school algebra, she took bookkeeping and accounting to satisfy graduation requirements, because she “didn’t want to do academic math anymore.” This decision helped in a 17-year career as a court cashier before she became a family worker and then an ECE teacher; it later exacerbated her effort to become certified.

Throughout the interviews, Cee made clear the pain of failure, especially when it comes to math—an experience so deep for her that at one point she said her father had a “dumb daughter” because she could not learn more advanced math. In the first 10 minutes of interviews, Cee reflected on this historical struggle.

> I ALWAYS had trouble with math. My father was excellent at math and he just could not understand why his daughter was not good at math. But I think part of it is his fault, too, because whenever he was trying to help me with my homework and I got an answer wrong, he would yell at me, and I would get really flustered. So I just learned to equate math with something that wasn't a good feeling.

Cee continued her discussion of how math makes her feel: "Anytime I have to deal with math … I just go back into that, like, mode of operation where I just get very frustrated with it … it really affected me." Other than math, Cee always had "very good grades but math was a problem…. It is still a problem for me." In describing her chronic challenges with math, Cee uses framing agency to position herself as the object of her strict military father's help and, subsequently, the recipient of his yelling; and she says this affected her long term, carefully adding, "In some ways I blame him." Taking up some grammatical agency, Cee signals how she has adapted to this experience—by placing blame on her father. In describing math, Cee uses the linking verbs *is* and *was* to equate math as a problem, particularly for her. Here, there is a felt pressure to pass the math exam, because it is still a problem for her in seeking certification.

As presented in her introduction, Cee has established a womanist (Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Walker, 2003) resistance to the life she had with her father, changing schools based on his military assignment. Primarily, she identifies as a mother, grandmother, and Afrocentric Black woman—for a season she owned a small business making Afrocentric table displays—and teacher. Despite her relative newness to the profession, she identifies very closely her ECE teaching identity.

Despite her many efforts to reframe herself in opposition to her father's failure narratives of her, Cee's experience with math (one of only two outstanding requirements) is a specific example of a pervasive problem that has wreaked havoc on the lives and careers of many otherwise qualified and experienced teachers across New York City. Because she has a history of failure with abstract and advanced math, Cee is deemed unqualified to teach ECE. Thus, Cee, like hundreds of other enthusiastic and capable new

teachers across New York City, remains uncertified. Like other teachers, Cee also was missing certain core requirements from her undergraduate program needed to earn ECE certification in New York State, so her master's program required her to complete statistics. To get through that class, Cee enlisted the help of tutors,

> like three, four times a week. I had to go for tutoring. And I did that on my own because, I just knew, to pass … it was my last semester…and I would not have graduated if I did not pass that class, so I had to do extreme things to get through.

In our first interview, Cee was preparing to take the math exam for the fourth time, "trying all kinds of strategies in the process," which was a departure from the math taught in her school of education, "ways to teach Geometry to students, how to do patterns with them, different types of activities and things like that." In this comparison of what she studied in her math methods courses to the information that is on the test, Cee offers an important moral framing that teachers took up in overlapping counter-narratives. In Chapter V, I will further examine teachers' common construction of the problems of certification and the math test in particular; however, I highlight her experiences with math both prior to beginning state tests and in taking math certification tests in order to situate teachers' experiences of failure in terms of their longer educational histories. This adds explanatory power to the ways in which they demonstrate agency in the face of sprawling certification requirements following graduation from ECE programs.

Precious: "Once I have that piece of paper, it takes a huge noose off my neck."

Like Faye and Cee, Precious, who now teaches in a charter school, holds some traditional views about education; but like Mercedes, she is from the borough where she teaches and therefore has better relationships with parents, because she is less judgmental concerning their circumstances. Precious is the only teacher in a PK-12 setting, now teaching first grade where she had been a parent. All of this contributes to how Precious navigates her identity as a teacher and professional at her school.

Precious had pursued an ECE degree and certification in order to open her own daycare center. When the tests changed in 2014, she had completed most but not all requirements, but gave up, because she had no intentions of teaching. When first presented with the idea of actually teaching, she said, "I can't be a teacher. These kids will drive me crazy!" At the time of the interview, she said, "I love it," but she still needed certification:

> I just feel like these two tests is a noose around my neck. I just feel like it's, it's because even here it kinda with [the charter school] they give you a waiver to work uncertified, but you can't, it's not like forever…. They're like, "Okay, Miss P, um, what's going on?" So, it's like now you took away my teaching status and have me as a long-term sub because I don't have my certification.

While neither active nor passive, Precious's use of a linking verb "is" to equate the tests with a noose draws up helpless and racialized images. She used this metaphor multiple times to describe the testing experience and how she was positioned as a result of test failure. Of particular importance to Precious was that she had been demoted to a long-term substitute position, which included a pay cut of $2,000 per month and harassment at the hands of an administrator, the "cruelest person," who "put up all these red flags about [her] not being certified." By the time of the interviews, the administrator had been dismissed due to her harassment of Precious.

In a later interview, even after Precious passed the math exam, she used the same language to describe the pressure. It was like a "chokehold" or a "noose," she said: "I felt like literally I was just strangling every time…. I think once I know I have that paper—like I said—it takes a huge noose off my neck cause I just felt like I was just strangling." Though Precious resisted the language of racism to describe her traumas associated with not being certified, this framing language she used across interviews, and even once she was certified, demonstrated her lack of power and the lasting effects of not being certified on teachers who internalize protracted under-credentialed status.

Precious described herself as aggressive but also very caring and tenderhearted, and she said she wants to be treated fairly, as she treats her students fairly, if strictly. Across the interviews, her strength of character seemed to influence how she navigated school as a student and now as a teacher. She resisted identifying any of her White, mostly Italian and Jewish teachers as racist; however, when she got pregnant in spring her junior year of high school, she was careful to conceal the pregnancy until fall, because of one teacher's derogatory comments about a classmate who had become pregnant, "'Look at her. That is just so disgraceful for someone that's not even finished high school, getting pregnant.' Just nasty, negative things about this girl." Based on my prior question that led to this answer, I asked Precious how she sensed a "racialized tone to it," and Precious softened, explaining that her teacher:

> never really came off as a racial person … if it was, maybe, a Caucasian girl being pregnant she might have a problem with [her too], but this happened to be a Spanish girl and it was just the way she talked. I don't really think it was about her race. I more think it was about the situation.

Across the interviews, Precious mitigated her answers to avoid labeling anyone or anything as racist, *including the tests*. She also resisted labeling other teachers as unqualified out of seeming deference to their humanity. Yet she demonstrated an underlying sense that the tests are oppressive, and some educators lack quality, often switching from more to less grammatical agency when describing her experiences with the exams: "I'm just a nervous person with testing. So with, I think that's what really beats [me] with these tests, just watching the clock and doing it on the computer." She says the tests "beat" her; but she also shifts some blame to the test itself, framing the computer-based format as a problem and alluding to the fact that watching the clock and doing the exam on a computer intensifies her anxiety. She moves from using a linking verb, dismissing the problem in terms of her identity, to positioning the computer-based test as an unnecessary added burden. Precious also uses "beating" to describe her self-criticism for not completing exams before they changed in 2012.

> I kinda always beat myself up, because I should have been finished with this a long time ago. I got my degree in 2012, so once I got my degree … I started working but I wasn't working in the field of education. I went back and … and then I passed [the L-A-S-T] when I took it the first time. Then that's when I took the A-T-S-W. I failed it the first time by two points. I had a 218 and I had to have 220. Went back and took it again and got a 219. That discouraged me. I was like, I'm not doing this no more. And I stopped. My fault. I had to stop.

Precious takes responsibility—"My fault. I had to stop"—but it is clear the tests have positioned her as a failure and influenced her giving up. This forced decision haunts Precious on multiple levels: as an applicant looking for teaching jobs in UPK, as an employee at her current school teaching first grade—who has, consequently, just been demoted to a permanent substitute position, and as someone who has failed exams multiple times.

> They had this like job fair … and everybody said you have a masters, why don't you have certification?... And this one lady was like, "Oh I would hire you right now, but you're not certified and it makes no sense hiring you as an assistant…. You need to get your certification."

Precious decided to participate in a program designed to help teachers pass exams. At the time, she determined, "This has to help me. I have to do this," but was disappointed with the outcome: "…and I'm here today, still struggling with the last two tests." In describing herself as still struggling, Precious forwards the problem faced by many teachers between 2012 and 2018 addressed below.

For Destiny, the harmful effects were even more painful.

Destiny: "The state will screw me over."

Precious has carried the weight of a years-long burden of not being certified, but she had been socially positioned to be a "fighter" and therefore blocked out her test failure, at least as presented on the surface of these interviews. Teachers such as Destiny, on the other hand, reported experiencing several cycles of depression and anxiety as a result of the accumulating burden of protracted test failure and not being certified. In

articulating counter-/narratives of pervasive cycles of harm triggered by certification testing across time, Destiny's experiences deserve particular attention in this study.

Destiny expressed emotional hot points in the third interview mirrored through her cadence as she kept returning to the same theme—the harm that had been caused by having to take and retake exams across a period of nearly 10 years. When Destiny finally completed all requirements and became certified between the second and third interviews, she could not feel joy, mitigating the prodigious toil by saying, simply that it felt like a waste of her time. Her boss, upon learning that Destiny had passed her last requirement, asked, "Why are you not excited?" Destiny then realized the source of her dread: "Because the state will screw me over, like they will come out and say something [is missing], you need this, or you need that." This sentence frames New York State, and specifically its Education Department, as having all power over Destiny's certification and captures a well of anxiety that had been building in her since she began feeling pressure to pass tests in the late aughts.

Like many college students preparing to take exams before tests changed in 2013, Destiny had taken and failed several exams before she experienced physical effects. By the time of our interviews, Destiny had taken and failed some 30 tests across nearly 10 years. At one point I asked if she had spent more than $2,000 of her own money to pass exams. She said it was no less than $10,000. However, her first cycle of depression did not begin until the state introduced its new "bar-like" exams (NYSED, 2014) and many teacher education students like Destiny were rushing to pass the old exams and be grandfathered in through this system. As a result, Destiny experienced deep anxiety and had to visit a medical doctor.

> When I first started taking the exams, and then I like failed … I was like OK, and I kept going and I kept going, and I didn't have … pressure until they were changing them and they were turning them into new exams, and I felt the pressure and I felt the anxiety. I started getting…. I ended up going to the doctor because I would wake up out of my SLEëp,

> couldn't breathe. That's how much pressure I was under. I was going to school, I was a full-time mom, and it was [a] lot going on.

In this excerpt, Destiny demonstrates grammatical agency prior to the tests' changing: "I first started taking exams," "I like failed," and "I kept going." She did not feel the pressure or reposition herself, demonstrating less grammatical agency, until the tests changed. First, she limits her grammatical agency, using the linking verb "felt" to demonstrate that pressure and anxiety were happening to her. Resignedly, she "ended up going to the doctor" because she "couldn't breathe." Finally, she positions herself as the object of enormous and overwhelming pressure. Going to school and being a mom, she could not juggle the added burden to pass the old exams before graduation.

"I was like 'Anxiety attacks, what is this?'" and the doctor asked, "Are you stressed?" Destiny explained that she was going to school full time, taking 12 credits a semester, and sharing shifts of childcare of her young daughter with her husband and mom, while trying to pass exams. Even with support, Destiny said, "it was a lot," later revealing that the added support contributed to the pressure she felt to succeed. Using framing agency to emphasize the pressure she feels, Destiny describes the sacrifices she made to be certified motivated by the pressure she experienced:

> I had the support, but nobody understands (painful inflection)…. I could tell [family], I could say this this and that but all they could say is "Everything is going to be OK" but no: everything is not going to be OK. You don't know how many, how much. Who am I doing this for? I'm doing it for you guys.

Destiny graduated in the Fall of 2012, uncertified, and she worked a series of tenuous low-paying jobs over several months before going on unemployment. She was hired and just started at her current place of work in August 2013 when her 28-year-old husband died of a diabetic heart attack. She is now remarried, but this experience informs her trajectory toward becoming certified and how she constructs the problem of certification, because it happened shortly after her graduation and while the new tests were being introduced. Having known Destiny closely since 2015, I have often sensed that proper

grief was stolen from her in the wake of ongoing pressure to become certified. Shortly after her husband's death, at the gentle but firm coaxing of her new director, the founder of a small childcare franchise in Brooklyn, Destiny resumed pursuit of additional credentials.

Like many committed teachers who do not pass exams after graduating from an undergraduate teacher preparation program, there is tremendous appeal to first complete the master's and worry about certification again afterwards. However, in the meantime, such teachers are often saddled with new student debt while not obtaining pay parity as they work uncertified and complete master's degrees.

> I kind of think it was like kind of forced cause I was working for [my director] at the time. So she was like telling me I need to go do my masters…. I didn't want to take out a loan, student loans, because I already started taking out student loans when I was in doing my bachelors…. So I was like, Oh man, I don't want to take out another loan. I went to see if I could like work at a company where like they paid for me to go back to college, but she was like pushing me and forcing me…. "You need a masters and can't teach if you only have a bachelors." So I decided to do that. So even though I'm like kind of disappointed cause now I'm like $70,000 in debt.

Seventy thousand dollars in debt and uncertified at the time of this interview, and yet, instead of saying, "The state has put me in debt!" Destiny used a linking verb to attach the debt to her identity. Destiny was only "kind of disappointed," because she did feel pride in her accomplishment. She also explained that she was "kind of forced" into getting a master's by her director, a small childcare owner, who could not subsidize her private degree at Selah School of Professional Education (Selah) (all four-year colleges and universities are pseudonyms). Destiny's ambivalence in repeated uses of "kind of" reflected a lack of agency and in-betweenness, not even able to assign blame that resulted, not from not wanting to go to school, but from wanting to avoid the seemingly inevitable debt that would accumulate. She only demonstrated grammatical agency in looking for options, "I went to see," in ultimately deciding to go back to school and, as

mentioned earlier in the transcript, in transferring to Selah from Two Forks University in order to save money. Her resignation continued in the last interview as she reflected that it will not help to harbor resentment, so she accepts this as a matter of waiting in a long line, saying in another interview, "It happened when it was supposed to happen."

Though Destiny had three high points in the nine years she worked to achieve certification—graduating from her undergraduate degree, securing a stable and supportive job, and graduating with her master's degree—her cycle of depression and anxiety had continued, as seen in her statement after finally being certified: "The state will screw me over." Despite the fact that she "sacrificed a lot," she "didn't get anything from it"—that is, the state-mandated tests for certification did not *teach* her anything. Destiny questioned whether her success is real and reduced the sum of these experiences to a "waste of time." Destiny's experiences speak deeply into and echo across the collective turmoil teachers have faced at the hands of New York State educational bureaucracy; therefore, I anchor my analysis across teachers' counter-/narratives to a theme of perpetration and loss below.

What Was Lost (or Stolen?): How Perpetrated Harm Constrains Agency

Teachers' counter-/narratives in this section represent tremendous loss and/or harm, and they demonstrate how teachers relied on normative and situated frames in order to mitigate the impact of their experiences narratively. The more that teachers positioned themselves as otherwise grammatically agentive, however, the more likely they were to initiate the work of resistance (or negotiation) to being constrained by master-narratives in their thinking and actions.

For the most part, Faye used a normative, colonialist lens grounded in her formal Jamaican upbringing, to account for the high expectations she held for children and justify her pathologizing of families; yet, across interviews she began to display more

internal conflict that revealed both a deep homesickness and a desire to not hold such fierce judgment of families. As will be seen in Chapter VI, her staunch stances helped to disrupt some narratives in the focus group, while the focus group resisted her deficit constructions of family. Nevertheless, the normative discourse, aligned with Faye's sense of educational expectations in Jamaica, guided most of her moral judgment, as made transparent in the interviews.

Motivated by her moral alignment with common colonial antecedent discourses in Jamaica, Faye positions herself as not being able to relate to anything in Africa. Though not an emotional hot point (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2009) for Faye, I position this as a loss of connection to the broader diaspora to which, others assume, she belongs. Implied here is the loss that her many African diaspora students are positioned from a colonialist, if not racist, lens. Even so, Faye effectively draws on her educational values to expose and challenge four-year-old students with gifted and talented curricula, thus serving as a "warm demander" (Delpit, 2012) who reimagines academic potentialities for students. In addition, because she has been positioned in a systematically racist school system that denies access to the culture of power (Delpit, 1995/2001), Faye finds herself in a position of advocacy, based on a situated morality that leads her to resist a vast array of ECE regulations (Souto-Manning, 2014) to ensure that her students reach their full potential.

Faye's advocacy is riddled with contradictions, including her deficit views of families that most of her parents choose to not "work with" their children at home and therefore she has to do it at school. Nevertheless, she brings her identity to bear on the U.S. context of teaching. Pushing against the crushing limitations of supposed developmentally appropriate practice epitomized in UPK for All curricula, Faye is demonstrating an emergent praxis—one that has been cultivated in this situated U.S. context. Moreover, her use of gifted and talented curricula served as an important challenge to abysmally low standards common in U.S. teaching (Hilliard, 2004). Thus, her developing praxis acknowledges the situated demands of Brownsville UPK teaching.

Cee's childhood was unstable and included several moves as their military family followed her dad wherever he was stationed. Her portrayal of him as a strict father who yelled at her while trying to help her with math suggests that while her contexts were always changing, her experiences have been constrained by the normative discourse of patriarchy and competitive masculinity (Deslandes, 2002). She positioned her father as harsh, yelling because she did not answer math questions correctly as a child. He has instilled in Cee some values, leading her to agree that he had a "dumb daughter." Though his normative discourse presenting her as a failure continues to shape Cee's sense of her potential to pass the math exam for certification, she has otherwise shaped her identity through a womanist (Dixson & Dingus, 2008) lens: "I am a female ... Black ... Teacher. I am a mother. A grandmother." Moreover, she positions him as a failure of her—"In some ways I blame him"—helping her to move forward with positive change and redefining her identity even as a math learner.

Mercedes's relational, collaborative identity is also shaped by her geographical upbringing, but due to the crack epidemic, she has established a unique situated morality. In contrast to Faye, Mercedes does not hold families in contempt for their problems. She was a child with incarcerated parents, and she works hard to ally with and tries to "not judge them." As a result, though much of her identity was shaped by this context, she is actively and purposefully adapting to her environment rather than seeing it as static or romanticizing it. She positions children as agents having power to develop themselves and shape her: "Over time, I see this child develop. And I see how that child has developed me." Mercedes has also cultivated a situated praxis, grounded in experiential morality, which she uses to build better worlds for children and impact her community.

Finally, Precious and Destiny have been shaped by what has been taken from them as a result of the specific discourses of teacher testing and certification. Destiny, given everything she has experienced, hauntingly mitigates her narrative of struggle with a simple reduction of the circumstances to "It was a waste of time." Destiny's fear that

the state will "screw" her over overlaps with Precious's statement after passing the math that not being certified was still like a noose around her neck. These visceral representations of experiences signal more subterranean suffering—out of sight to me as a White researcher, and perhaps not fully accessible in teachers' meta-awareness, too. Both Destiny's and Precious's resistance to call the tests racist and their alignment with the normative discourse of whiteness serves as a powerful reminder that racism is a work of stealth (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Both Destiny and Precious responded passively, over-simplifying their experiences: "I don't let it get to me" and "It was a waste of time." At the same time, these statements indicated a reconciling of what cannot be controlled in order to focus on what can be controlled. Thus, both teachers exert some mitigation over the harm caused by systemic injustices, rather than yielding more power to this pain.

These narratives and counter-narratives differ in multiple ways, and yet there exists in them the common question of systematically racist perpetration. With the exception of Faye, the ways in which teachers demonstrate a lack of agency in these narratives is directly tied to the ways in which systemic racism and interlocking oppressions have upheld and deepened systems of oppression that caused them greater intersectional harm. Nevertheless, the bedrock of critical pedagogy, CRT, and critical whiteness studies, the frameworks on which this study rests, is to uphold agency as a tool for challenging oppressive norms. Holding no fantasies or illusions about how such agency manifests, it is the work of this line of critical research, and in particular, the work of those of us who engage in CNA, to build on this dialectic of praxis in order to theorize ways forward.

Throughout the narratives highlighted here, Faye, Mercedes, Cee, Precious, and Destiny exhibited significant forms of grammatical agency, despite the fact that some prevailing normative or situated discourse informed many of the decisions they made and values they held. What mattered to these teachers was driven by their volition to continue but also by the circumstances that surrounded them. They are not representative of a type

of teacher who has less grammatical agency, but their narratives are examples of how agency and morality are shaped by situated circumstances, demonstrating how both broad dominant discourses and locally established ones manifest in teachers' experiences of the tyranny of testing. Likewise, narratives represented in the next section emphasize teacher agency and resistance while still unveiling how larger discourses shape their experiences as teachers and professionals.

Teacher Resistance at Work in Pushing Against Dominant Narratives: Barbie, Maria, Shopno, Joy, and Miesh

In the first section of this chapter, I combined the counter-/narratives of teachers who have been be shaped or constrained by their context in powerful ways that were reflected in their construction of teaching quality in the individual interviews. While Mercedes and Cee might have been included in this section, and there are teachers in this section who might have been included above, this grouping allows me to conceptualize context and agency in this study while drawing on the similarities and contrasts in teachers' experiences. In this section, I highlight counter-narratives that bring attention to teachers' agency in action, despite circumstances. While normative and situated frames also inform their actions, these counter-narratives provide focus on teachers' actions despite constraints.

Barbie: "They loved it so much they took care of it."

Barbie is a captivating storyteller. When I first asked about her identity, I was surprised to get what felt like the abridged history of her Garifuna people in the short span of our first 10 minutes together. She exudes wisdom, knowledge, and advocacy with the warmth and vigor of a non-elder, proudly sharing that she was one of the first immigrant New Yorkers ever to attend Head Start, dating herself ever-so-slightly (she later proudly shared that she was 55 years young). An intimate elder knowledge of Head

Start was thus imbued in all our interviews. For purposes here, I sampled a short exemplar counter-narrative that brings together many of her identities that bear on her practical resistance as a teacher.

In this counter-narrative, Barbie shared about a recent experience she had with her school's UPK coordinator: "I mean, my experience with her, my first experience with her, she was just so insulting. You know, she just wanted to make changes." As an experienced teacher who has worked in Head Start for over 30 years, Barbie takes umbrage at new people coming in and starting the conversation with "feedback." She understands the differences in evaluation systems for Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), the department of education, and Head Start, and she knows what works for her families and for the communities that she serves, but she expects good manners. Nevertheless, in working with "Ms. B.," Barbie was undeterred in her professionalism. In the following narrative, somewhat paraphrased while drawing heavily on quotes, I demonstrate how Barbie constructed herself as powerful and agentive.

After one particularly difficult interaction, Barbie took the initiative with Ms. B.: "I went home and I reflected on it…. Having completed [another research] study with my professor." Barbie told Ms. B., "You know, let me utilize what I've learned." In setting up this narrative, Barbie shows her grammatical agency. She "reflected" and decided to "utilize" what she had learned. Barbie continued to narrate, first explaining that she tried to put herself in Ms. B.'s shoes: "Why would she need to come in and make changes if things were the way they were supposed to be so that the children can learn conducively in the classroom?" Barbie completed a critical inventory of the classroom and said, "The next time that [Ms. B.] comes, we're going to be prepared…because we're going to reflect on what we need to do better." With a classroom team that includes an ICT co-teacher and two assistants, Barbie "made a list of everything that [they] felt needed to be corrected."

Using framing agency and highlighting a normative sense of what the UPK coordinator would want, "everything that needed to be corrected," Barbie prepared offensively for the next visit. She demonstrated relational competence in putting herself in the coordinator's shoes, asking, "Why would she need to come in and make changes" if there was not a good reason? However, Barbie's framing throughout her counter-narrative indicates that she had not given into the whims of a consultant; instead, she used the consultant's criticism as an opportunity to make the classroom stronger. The nuance between a less senior teacher and someone with Barbie's confidence and experience is important. She is not acting out of fear but out of protection—both for her team and her children; and as a learner, she is excited to "correct" her classroom if it will serve the best interests of her students and teaching team.

Barbie's counter-narrative continued to confirm that she was blending offensive (as opposed to defensive) tactics with genuine professional development. When Ms. B. returned for another review, Barbie gave her a grand welcome:

> I greeted her and she said, "Oh, Miss [Barbie] it was really nice to be greeted by someone pleasant." And I said, "That's because I have some news to share with you. We made the changes, as you suggested, and I found that it was enjoyable to teach this unit. It wasn't laborsome. In fact, I discovered some things that I had not previously known as a teacher."

Welcoming the consultant into her classroom, Barbie set the terms of the review, but she had also made significant changes to the flow of the unit in keeping with the consultant's request. She both appeased the consultant and authentically delighted in how her children had taken ownership of the unit. Furthermore, in reporting on the inquiry that she and her colleagues had co-created, Barbie positioned her students as agents of their own learning and continued to delight in their collaborative process. Here, she explains that her children developed their inquiry about how plants grow in underwater caves:

> They became very interested in different bodies of water such as oceans and lakes and rivers and pond. So, I had to research, and I discovered something that I had never really fully understood as a student,

> that in order for plant life to exist in oceans, there has to be a certain amount of water with sunlight…so that the water will develop the plant life.
>
> It needs the sun. Now, I never thought about it until the children decided that they were going to become very curious. So, I had to research and instead of a regular bulletin board, we discovered that we had to make a big sun and then create the bulletin board with water at the bottom [including] sand and caves—now they brought up the cave. They said, "Well, because we had read the story about the little bear living in the cave," and they know that there's no light [in a cave] from the light unit. So they scaffold what they learned from one unit to the next unit, which was water. And I said… "uh huh," they are absolutely correct.

Positioning herself—"I had to research," "I discovered"—and her students—"they brought up the cave," "They scaffold"—as agents, Barbie presented a success story to the consultant that reflected adjustments she made to the curriculum that had enhanced the classroom inquiry. Given her experience as a teacher and other counter-narratives she had shared, Barbie has an established ethos of collaborative learning with children. However, she had learned to value continued growth, so she made adjustments that resulted in a positive outcome she could share with her evaluator, positioning herself as a qualified teacher without compromising her underlying sense of herself as an elder teacher.

Barbie continued her counter-narrative highlighting details of what children created as they evolved their questions. Next, the students:

> decided that they were going to turn the dramatic play area into a pond. So I had to think, how do we do this? So we used the paper and we cut a big hole and the big pieces of paper and we let them draw and color all around what they thought would live in that pond. And I purchased a fishing rod as opposed to making one because I wanted them to be safe and they had one mural on the ground, we cut it open and [used] blue plastic to emulate the water and they went to town with it, every single day. Three or four or five children would go into dramatic play. They loved it so much, they took care of it. They put everything back in place. So, the next day they could come back and start all over again with their play.

Consistent with the realities of teaching public UPK, Barbie's classroom is evaluated by different agencies multiple times per year. They were evaluated by CLASS during this unit, and the UPK coordinator inquired why the dramatic play area was not transformed

into “one of the suggested areas.” Barbie’s team broadly responded, again positioning their ownership of the classroom, “Oh, we reflected with the children and children were interested in the pond, and their bulletin board is of an ocean,” so it was not necessary. In the narrative, the coordinator further inquired but was pleased with the team’s responses.

> And she said, “You see, that’s all that I wanted to hear Ms. [Barbie]. Your class, your students, your teachers made this unit their own. And that’s what learning and teaching is all about.” And when I shared it with my director, she said, “Oh, today, Ms. [B.] was so happy when she left your classroom, she went into the other classrooms and made no suggestions for changes, she said maybe they should all go visit classroom three.”

Barbie’s narrative is more than a heroic tale of her success in pleasing the consultant. Rather, it presents Barbie as morally triumphant as she pleased the coordinator and her director and insulated her continued practices of high-quality teaching with her students from outside intrusion. Barbie did not gloat in what she knew but demonstrated agency in showing professionalism without fear—taking ownership of the consulting relationship and translating her work for the consultant so that the consultant would better appreciate Barbie’s teaching excellence.

The relationship is not without its problems. It is hierarchical, and the consultant clearly misses Barbie’s brilliance as a teacher, evident in her stating the obvious, “That’s what learning and teaching is all about,” but Barbie maintains her focus on the children and a strong commitment to continuing to learn as an experienced teacher. Across her interviews, Barbie constructed many counter-narratives of how she engaged normative discourses with necessary performances while holding a manifest value for learning that is reflected in all her teaching and teaching advocacy narratives. Moreover, as the only teacher in this study with an identified learning disability, dyslexia, Barbie engaged in many counter-narratives that position her dyslexia as a strength that helps her both appreciate the challenges that her children will confront in learning and delight in the new

perspectives her children bring to her own learning every day. As a result, she is skillful in supporting and challenging student growth in her Head Start classroom.

Maria: "I just want you to be home so you can help me!"

Maria's counter-narratives share notable similarities with those of other teachers in the study, but she also has a very unique history, and she was one of the most explicitly race critical teachers who participated. Unsurprisingly her criticality comes with the great cost of multiple racist experiences that were perpetuated inside schools. Maria's parents are immigrants, and she grew up speaking Spanish at home, with her grandparents as primary caregivers after school. In second grade, she

> passed the exam to be in [an] English only classroom, but my mom pushed that I continue [bilingual education] so that I can be more fluent in English and Spanish. So now I'm able to read and write both languages.

Eventually being removed from bilingual education in fifth grade, though delayed, made schoolwork nearly impossible for her to complete as her language and culture were pushed out by her school to make way for normative white, monolingual, Eurocentric education: "I was switched over to just Spanish—I mean, to just English. They were like, 'We can no longer allow her to continue studying and learning in Spanish. We're just gonna put her in English only class.'"

Here, Maria uses an embedded syntax to demonstrate the importance of her mother's advocacy for her. She says, "My mom pushed so that I can continue." Highlighting her mother's agency, she points to the opportunities this has created for her. She demonstrated framing agency in several other statements except regarding her fluent bilingualism, which she positioned as an asset using grammatical agency, while still crediting her mother's advocacy: "I passed the [English] exam," and later, "Now I'm able to read and write both languages." She positioned her mother as an agent twice (once before this excerpt), stating that she "pushed" for Maria to remain in the bilingual class. Maria also framed her school as having agency over her, because they "switched" her to

the English classroom. The school made excuses, employing framing agency, “We can no longer allow her to continue studying and learning in Spanish,” but ultimately, they put her “in English only class.”

Afterwards, Maria described academic fallout and frustration because her grandparents could not help her with her homework. She began to beg her mother to quit one of her jobs so that she could help Maria. Here, a child, reacting agentively to her school’s failure of her, Maria cried out for help from her mother:

> I do recall, like when I first started monolingual that all my homework were in English. I struggled because I was at home with my grandparents and my mom was working. And I remember just calling her and like, “I need you. I need help because I don’t understand the homework!”... And I remember one Sunday I told my mom, “You’re working too much! I need you. Can you leave one job? It’s okay if we eat just rice and chicken every day, or rice and eggs every day. I just want you to be home so that you can help me because you know I’m struggling with this!” I recall speaking and having those conversations with my mom at a younger age.

Though she positions herself as an agent in statements such as “I first started monolingual,” “I struggled,” and even “I need you!” it is clear that this is the case out of desperation. Maria recognizes there is a moral wrong in a child having to ask her mother to quit work because of obstacles established by school (placing her in a monolingual program): “I recall speaking and having those conversations with my mom at a younger age.” Across the interviews, Maria positions herself as someone who resists racism through self-sacrifice and advocacy. This does not mean she is not weary, but advocacy for herself and others is a driving force in her pursuit for justice and equity for all her students and her. Thus, she continues the professional legacy of her mother, an educator.

Maria attended the same undergraduate institution, Bronx University (Bronx U), as Mercedes; both of them received harmful advising there, and it prevented Maria from pursuing her first career choice, speech pathology. Having passed required exams and completed what she understood to be the necessary coursework, Maria was not given certain undergraduate prerequisites, because she was Latina and Spanish was her first

language. Drawing attention to her college's role in shutting down her career path, Maria demonstrated her lack of grammatical agency in becoming certified: the school "failed to give me three [pedagogy] classes" needed to become a speech teacher. "It's so bad because the person you asked for permission to take your classes at Bronx U, by just looking at you she'd be like, 'You're not making it.'" Maria rallied peers not to give up, despite the negativity that she and they received:

> I had one classmate … and she had this mentality that, "Oh, we can't do this!"… And I' like, "All right. So let's do this. You quiz me and I quiz you." And sometimes her answers was better than mine! And I'm like, "You see? You should be helping ME!" (laughs).

> But her mind was so focused on all the negativity: "And all of the people that usually graduate in their Masters in Speech at Bronx U are Caucasian. We won't be able to do it. We're Hispanics. They're not gonna look at us." And it's true. Most of the Masters, the graduate students from Bronx U that take speech as their Masters, came from different schools. Half of them didn't come from Bronx U.… And you'll probably see one Hispanic, two Hispanic graduates in the school. So, she was so focused on that. I was like, "Don't worry, Bronx U is not the only school. We can go anywhere else! Let's just finish what we started."

In these examples, Maria demonstrates her agency in supporting a classmate to prevail against racist stereotypes at her college. Employing a collectivist framing agency, using variations of the first personal plural "we," Maria implores her friend "Let's do this!" "We can go anywhere!" and "Let's just finish what we started!" However, her narrative recognizes helplessness, using the linking verb "see": "You'll probably see one Hispanic, two Hispanics," noting also that most of the students in the speech pathology program "didn't come from Bronx U"—a minority serving institution with graduate programs not reflecting the undergraduate populations in its ranks.

Maria's positive self-talk is commendable but should not be necessary and is not always effective. When we met for the first interview, she shared that she was pregnant with her third child and busy with preparations, but she was motivated to participate in the study because she wanted to share her negative experiences co-teaching with a White

female Teach for America first-year teacher. As a result of the interviews, Maria unveiled a series of racist narratives across her experiences as a primary school bilingual student, as a college undergraduate, and now, as a special education UPK teacher and charter school mom. In the focus group interview, Maria posed and analyzed these narratives in greater detail, and they became central to teachers' co-constructed counter-narratives in the focus group. Therefore, I return to her counter-narrative in Chapter VI.

Shopno: "I don't want to see myself that way."

Each of my three interviews with Shopno took place outside on a small patio of a public library in the suburbs of Queens. The sun beamed down on us, and we shifted a little in our seats as we sat on mesh metal furniture for more than two hours each time. Shopno loves to talk: "That's my bad habit," she apologized unnecessarily more than once. The library sits under the flight path for JFK Airport, and on occasion, I cannot hear for transcription a word or sentence because Shopno rarely stopped to wait for the planes to pass. I read this as an eagerness to share experiences. Since she was not able to attend the focus group, and she had many counter-narratives and suggestions in line with this study's research questions, after obtaining her enthusiastic consent, we engaged in longer discussions than the planned 90 minutes. These extended conversations, given Shopno's powerful criticality and sharp memory, resulted in significant co-created CNA.

As you will see across transcripts, Shopno uses an alternative syntax to mainstream White English (Baker-Bell, 2020). Consistent with the continuing colonial project in South Asia, she was required to receive at least one academic course in English and learned English as her second language, but she "never officially go for learning English." The context in which she learned English combined with her accent make her vulnerable to linguistic racism, as she experienced in one class in her teacher education master's program. She was giving a presentation to her class on diversity.

> I was presenting, [another student] said, "Oh I know this accents that is, we don't wanna hear that." She said in whole class in front when I just started for presentation … she speaking in clear English and she said, "Oh, look here is the accent, which is I don't want to hear that."

As will be seen across examples, Shopno treated this as a learning opportunity instead of simply internalizing her classmate's racist behavior. Shopno carefully observed her professor's response with particular attention to "What was the professor role?... I don't have any idea also what will be the professor role because she is not even diverse." Shopno's question is important to understanding how she constructs interracial and interethnic dialogue as a learner, usually with other People of Color (Sue, 2015). Perhaps others would expect a professor to respond as this professor did, but—indicating her lack of faith in university-based teacher educators— Shopno was surprised and delighted.

> [The] professor said, "We're living in New York, where is lot of diversity and I'm learning in my way, professor said, she learning on her way, so is OK, and is OK to make yourself comfortable in different accent…. My role is making teachers, and of course our teachers when they are from different background is OK to be teacher when they academically OK in English…. I don't have any accent even, but is OK because we are all in New York."

This rare example of being vindicated by someone else and not having to do the work to create the connection herself was an important moment, because Shopno performs the lion's share of emotional labor in most interracial/interethnic conversations (Sue, 2015).

Of all the teachers in this study, it could be argued that Shopno has the most precarious intersectionally minoritized identity, even compared to Maria. A relaxed Muslim immigrant from eastern Bangladesh and single mother of two school-aged children, who does not wear a hijab, Shopno is often mistaken for being Latina. She is generous to others, acknowledging that it is easy to misidentify her. In fact, she pointed out that some people at one school where she worked confused her with the Latina social worker: "She actually look like if I open my hair, swept my hair, you can tell a lot of people get confused most of time with her and me." However, the ways that she responds to being positioned as Other—and misidentified as incorrectly Other—helped to

demonstrate Shopno's agentive identity and her cultural brilliance as she uses questions to disarm and engage others in positive "race talk" (Sue, 2015). Thus, she pushes back against harmful norms to raise cultural understanding and build community.

In one of her counter-narratives, Shopno highlighted difficult conversations she had with a director who appreciated Shopno's abilities and yet was concerned about a Latinx child coming into her classroom whose mother was the president of the PTA. The child had special needs, and the parent told the director she wanted her daughter to be taught by a Spanish-speaking Latina teacher, so the director warned Shopno that there would be hostility. Shopno responded, "I told you I'm so confident with that, but of course you have to give me the time and opportunities … I can meet the challenge." And she did. Using a theme of "love around the world" and other opportunities to connect with families, Shopno encouraged families to share knowledge from their cultures. With this and other culturally relevant practices, Shopno earned trust and respect. Moreover, her agentive confidence in statements such as "I can" signal her professional quality as integrated with her intersectional identity.

Shopno's ability to demonstrate respect for families and their different cultures was highlighted across interviews, and her contributions extended beyond the gambit of her classroom. In one example, which she used to frame her ethics and agency as a professional inside the culture of schools, Shopno cited a time when a social worker misidentified a Bengali family that had come to enroll their child in school.

> My social worker in that school ^ she didn't realize [the mother was] speaking in Bengali. She said she speaking in Arabic or something. And for me … I understand because I know different languages that's actually like that's what … determined ME to come to this field and helping children … then I say, "Why you feel she's speaking in Arabic?" She said, "Oh it just sounds like that." Then I was there, and I said, "No she's speaking in actually my language which is I know that is Bengali."

In this excerpt, which continues at some length as she recounts several details from the experience, Shopno demonstrated framing and grammatical agency as a professional: her

multilingualism "determined ME to come to this field and helping children," and thus her confidence to correct the social worker, a Latina, and engage in productive interracial/ interethnic race talk (Sue, 2015). As is consistent across her narratives, Shopno quickly identified the problematic situation: the social worker "didn't realize." Next, she engaged in a correction by initiating with a question, "Why you feel she's speaking in Arabic?" followed by a listening response that corrects the social worker's mistake. Here the social worker had used a defensive strategy consistent with the literature on microaggressions to minimize her "microinvalidation" of Shopno (p. 274). According to Sue et al. (2007),

> In most cases, when individuals are confronted with their microaggressive acts … the perpetrator usually believes that the victim has overreacted and is being overly sensitive and/or petty. After all, even if it was an innocent racial blunder, microaggressions are believed to have minimal negative impact. People of color are told not to overreact and to simply "let it go." (p. 278)

Many people, according to Sue (2015), would leave it at that, contributing to the conspiracy of silence. On the other hand, Shopno's thoughtful correction led to a fuller conversation that contributed positively to the school's culture overall. Shopno takes great pride in her ability to interrupt biased incidents, so that intercultural communication in her Queens community can be expanded to respect all families and create a positive, inclusive, and multicultural atmosphere. Both in narrating the event and in quoting herself from the event, Shopno employs grammatical agency: "I said," "I say," "I know." Moreover, Shopno indicates framing agency in interpreting her abilities as an important part of a quality early childhood environment. After reporting that the social worker apologized and said she did not know the family was Bengali, Shopno theorized the importance that community-based teachers be multilingual. She then adds, demonstrating more agency, that counter-narratives such as this are why she signed up to be involved in this research study.

> [Whoever] work in community-based is really really important to know other than English^ so then they can helping that people. Of course,

> English is necessary for this community, this country, because it's first priority but of course is necessary to [know] other language too. You can't going through only with English.…That's why I decided to actually continue your journey … when you said you was looking for something that people can share.

Shopno demonstrates framing agency when emphasizing that English is still important, but she makes an important point that you need other languages, too. She also shows powerful grammatical agency in identifying that she joined the research study, "I decided," in order to make it clear how important it is that people like her be in community-based settings to add to quality by translating, not just the literal word for families, but translating worlds, understanding across cultures, too.

Shopno indicated additional frustration that the social worker admitted "she just saw one woman with hijab and she's speaking something she couldn't understand she just feels she from any Arabic country. She just give her assumption like that." Shopno firmly but patiently continued the dialogue: "No actually a lot of other countries also has Muslim community which is not speaking Arabic but they have different languages and they come from different culture and community." As a result, the social worker learned more about the Bengali community, which has a large presence near the school.

Over time, Shopno:

> build up a lot of social environment over there, diverse community…. I stayed with them six year. So, end up we build up really good relationship with that school, that community. All employees, they learn a lot.

Employing grammatical agency, Shopno establishes that she was responsible for building up her school faculty's knowledge base and as a result helped create a more inclusive environment for the school's community there, and she strengthens her use of grammatical agency the second time by changing from first person singular "I build" to "we build," which is reflective of Shopno's firm but collaborative professional ethos. It can be tempting to suggest that Shopno is hyperbolic in describing her impact, but her many counter-narratives of quality suggest otherwise. In accounting for her ability to

disarm others and engage them in difficult conversations, Shopno highlighted that she is a very "loving person" and that she learned several years ago the importance of smiling and friendliness when engaging others in difficult confrontations.

Across interviews, Shopno identified having multiple interracial/interethnic dialogues in various school contexts, including professional development (PD) settings.

> Now I'm professional, I go lot of different places, but when counts for of course part of our workshop it was like "Group, let's go make in [ethnic affinity] group or, different language [group]," It's gonna come more in my life. But then, I said "Ok, why people just sorting me out?" Then I think of OK, if I'm come with hijab, then people gonna say, "OK you Middle East—go this way." I DON'T WANT TO SEE MYSELF THAT WAY. Maybe that, also for my curiosity^. But what I said, I wanna establish myself, my community. Here is something other than Arabic. Identify other than Latin identify. Here is something people look like in general, but they have different identity. Maybe I wanna see that get proper identified.

Demonstrating less grammatical agency when questioning why people "sort her," Shopno frames this behavior as unacceptable and not to be let go. Using framing agency, Shopno asserts both her identity and her wishes for herself and the diverse families that she serves, emphasizing her words: "I DON'T WANT TO SEE MYSELF THAT WAY." Importantly, she says she wants to "establish" herself and her community as more than one thing, and when people fail to put in the effort to ask and to get to know others, the result is oversimplification of the complex identities of others.

In a recent PD workshop hosted by NYC's Department of Education, she respectfully questioned a self-identified Dominican professional developer who was creating ethnic affinity groups and misidentified Shopno as Dominican, trying to place her in the Latinx group. She did not go to the group he expected her to join, so he commented in English that maybe she should join that group. When she still did not join the group, he addressed her in Spanish, thinking that she did not understand. Shopno demonstrated tremendous grammatical agency in her approach, seeking to understand and build understanding:

> When people even identify me, I always try to understand why they take me that way. I always—I never just left the situation. When he say, "Sorry," I say, "It's OK, but can you tell me why you feel that way?" Then he said, "Ma'am actually for your outlooking [appearance]" … AND color. He said, "You little tan so that whole things in my mind feel you might be Dominican because skin color and your way to dress up and you don't have hijab."

At her son's school, Shopno confronted more micro-aggressions with more interracial and interethnic dialogue including with a front desk administrator who was White, identified as Italian and could not pronounce "Bangladesh." She was also addressed in Spanish by that school's social worker—who had once started translating for her in Spanish. Frustrated, Shopno complained, "She didn't even ask me!" Highlighting framing agency, here and in other places, Shopno demonstrates the moral wrong of fomenting cultural confusion by not asking enough questions or seeking to learn from others. Using grammatical agency, she shows how she models the appropriate response that helps support families and build better, more inclusive, multicultural communities.

As presented in her introduction, Shopno wants people to appreciate her multiple identities, and she leverages her complex understandings of her own identity in working with children and families, especially other South Asian families, in community-based settings.

> Again, I try to put myself even more to family also when I see diverse, so if I see even any South Asian other family also, I understand Urdu, also, Hindi, which is my neighbor countries, Pakistan and India, so when I see those all families they going to identify different way, I try to just um jump in and help.

Shopno expressed a feeling of protectiveness for families who go through misidentification and invisiblization, and she knows she has power to help bridge differences and improve the quality of other staff in the process of her advocacy.

> I don't want to see MY community or any diverse community [misidentified], go like that getting services, they're identify UNKnown, random someone. I feel—that's why I just put myself to helping social worker to understand, other than Arabic, could be Muslim, could be speaking in different languages. That way she could better help.

Shopno highlighted that she does not want to be passive in communities that need her help. Instead, she framed the situated needs of families in her community as a moral imperative that drives her work and her theory of high-quality community-based teaching. She wants to make sure they are respected for the sum total of their identities, and this ethic extends beyond her role in the lives of South Asian families.

> Diverse family, they need to identify proper way. That's my goal…. And I think teacher can do this is a better way because they meet every other day 10 or 20 or twenty SIX different families. Every day. So, even though I'm working with students, I think this is a bigger field to develop that led people to understand respective way that they're—and please don't say, "People, because you look like," like what I'm saying "Black, White, Latino, or something."

Here, Shopno takes on a strong moralizing tone, revoicing common microaggressions that she hears based on individuals' first impressions. Adding on to this, she explained how she purposefully resists the pressure to do what Sue and his colleagues (2007) suggest most People of Color do when faced with microaggressions in trying to let it go: "Lot of people might be just thinking 'Let it go.'… of course it is important to not let it go: Because I don't want somebody identify me something and then just let it go, so I want actually, let's see why." Shopno cannot let it go, because she sees being correctly identified and "not sorted" as the building blocks for belonging in community. In her words, "Let's see why," Shopno demonstrates her ability to suspend judgment and collaborate with others in dialogic inquiry in service of collective understanding.

In these examples, Shopno unveiled her agency and professional self-confidence by pushing against misunderstanding to build ethnic and cultural understanding. In Chapter V, I return to more analysis of how she constructs her teaching quality in light of how she supports diverse families in community-based settings.

Joy: "I guess in my mind I choose not to remember it."

Across her interviews, Joy and I returned to many of the same themes, her deft teaching skills, her collegiality, and most prominently, the absurdity of content on the CST Math test. Admittedly, Joy is not a good test taker, and this has been the case since she was in high school. In high school, she learned how to "cram" long enough to pass a test for her math, science, and history courses, but for the New York State tests, she is frustrated that she does not know what to study, framing test makers as having agency over her, "What they give you as practice it is just how to take the test. They don't give you information that you would need to know on the tests," and to her, test questions seem random.

> I only remember the Boston Tea Party because I keep getting the question on every test I take, and my mom used to have a [pop out] book with Paul Revere.… So I mean that's on the test it's not making any sense to me because I DONT REMEMBER it and I guess in my mind I choose not to remember it, because I am not teaching that^ so I don't know if it's psychological (laughs).

Joy laughs off the possibility that this is somehow psychological, but after much review, it seems that there is truth that she is resisting the standardized knowledge of the test. From the analytic frame of this dissertation study, Joy utilizes grammatical agency in significant ways here. Whereas other teachers, when describing tests, are more likely to position the tests as having power over them, Joy positions herself as an active agent taking tests: "I remember," "I don't remember," and "I choose not to remember." She positions the tests as reducing her grammatical agency over her in statements such as "I keep getting the question" and "that's not making any sense to me," but even in these statements, especially the latter, there is an active working out as she is seeking to make sense of questions that don't make sense, and in this she embeds an awareness that she is not the problem—the tests are the problem.

Consistently, as I probed across these interviews, Joy resisted my suggestion that she might not be passing, because she had always been a bad test taker. Drawing

attention to the fact that she did, in fact, pass tests in high school by "cramming," Joy shows that these tests do not even allow for that: "I didn't like history, so none of it sticks to me, and then I don't know WHAT exactly they're gonna ask on the test, so I'm like ... How do I prepare myself for it?" Never mind the fact that most of these tests are practically irrelevant to teachers' everyday work with children. Here, again, Joy positions herself agentively in stating that she "didn't like history," and what is worse, she could prepare herself for the exam—long enough to take and pass it, *if* the system were structured more equitably and she knew what to study.

Another way I confirmed Joy's agency and resistance was in looking at how she talked about her teaching in comparison to the tests across the three interviews.

> I feel like [arts and sciences test content] was stuff from high school … so in my mind I'm saying why do I need to remember that if I'm teaching early childhood? We don't use that for early childhood, so I felt like the questions should be geared more towards basically teaching kids, early childhood.… I think history for them is more geared towards their cultures, you know talking about different cultures with them because they all are different, they look different, like their family, so to me that's the history that we teach in early childhood.

Aligning with critiques of Eurocentric epistemologies in early childhood education (Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018) and education more generally (Hilliard, 2004), Joy resists the notion that there is a common list of general background that she needs to have in order to be an excellent teacher, consistent with her subconscious resistance to remembering such details.

Joy, a former board member of New York City's chapter of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and a graduate of Banner College, a well-known private school in New York, is a fastidious learner who attends national and state conferences, learning everything she can, not just from presenters but from table mates and others as well:

> We didn't know each other, so it was like whatever advice they would give … "Oh this is what we do in California," "Oh this is what we did in

> Texas." You know, it's kind of made me think like OK, if it worked for them, why not I try it?

This description is not isolated. Joy's mentor at the Borough of Manhattan Community College took all her students to conferences, and Joy shared that experience with her programs and schools—with some directors going as far as closing school for staff development in order to take all teachers to state and city ECE conferences. In the end, in terms of teacher quality, what mattered most to Joy is whether or not someone can apply their knowledge in order to help children learn and grow.

> Some people are good test takers. They can remember but when it comes to [putting] it into action, they can't…. If I was a good test taker, I would have passed this a long time ago, but that's not to say that I would do a good job.

Though Joy acknowledges the superficial value of being a "good test taker," as will be discussed in Chapter V, she signals the harm of confusing teaching quality with test taking skills—all while calling into question the standardized knowledge promulgated by tests. Joy's experience reflects a rejection of the dominant racialized ideology and a counter-narrative that incorporates her interdisciplinary knowledge and skills as applied to her pedagogy, critical thinking, and practice. She pushes against discourse that frames her competency based on certification exams; and she positions the Eurocentric (Souto-Manning, 2018, 2019), decontextualized (Mensah & Jackson, 2018) information that is tested, divorced from any useful application to her teaching, as causing her failure. Of all the teachers, Joy demonstrated the most grammatical agency and resistance to normative discourses that tie testing and certification to quality. I will continue to draw from her counter-narratives as I account for how teachers' respective counter-narratives contribute to a better understanding of quality.

Miesh: "I can't spend the rest of my life not wanting to do what my dream was."

Not all teachers in this study took their failure personally. Though a more in-depth psychological analysis might reveal that all of them on some level are deeply affectively

impacted by failure, the failure itself is not their primary concern. For Miesh, a self-identified perfectionist who is a strong student and takes pride in being an organized and excellent communicator, the failure itself is the problem.

Across the interviews, Miesh identified an inner conflict between being a perfectionist and having perpetual test failure. One of the primary ways she negotiated that conflict was with confidence and positive thinking, but there were limits to the power of that thinking. In particular, Miesh expressed feelings of guilt because she became depressed, not after the death of her grandmother, the person who had always been there "to speak INTO" her, nor when her father died the summer of 2018, but when all the failures accumulated, and her primary support system was gone. Miesh broke.

> I just didn't want to be around anybody and that's not me…. I didn't even go through depression with [grandmother's death]; how would I go through depression with this? But it's the build-up. It's not just something automatically happens (snaps fingers) and you just [become] depressed. NO! It's a build-up of THINGs that you're not letting out.

Describing depression to be endured, Miesh highlights her agency in getting through it while also emphasizing it as something that happens to you over time: "It's a build-up." Then she uses the linking verb "become" to explain how this build-up happens to a person over time. More than once, Miesh described this as a dark time in her life, or like a dark cloud was hanging over her, and she showed how the test was causing her pain, even failures were accumulating in the midst of other problems. For example, she described having trouble talking with her family about the tests:

> Not passing the test would be simple for anybody else, like "Why is she going through depression over a test, like is that really that serious?" But yes, it IS that serious to me, because it has a meaning to ME, to my life, so YEAH I am depressed I am upset about it.

Here, Miesh shows that a failing test score frames her identity, "It has a meaning to ME," and as a result she uses linking verbs to describe herself as "depressed" and "upset."

I didn't complete interviews II and III and the video recall session with Miesh until December 2019, because the summer of the interviews her father died, and she had taken off work to engage in a rigorous tutoring program in hopes of passing the math exam. That, combined with continued test failure despite the extra effort to pass, made it difficult to talk. We stayed in touch by text message on and off from the fall of 2018 until we met again, and over time, we agreed that it was important for her to finish. She had insights to contribute, and she insisted on finishing. By the time of these interviews, Miesh had taken the math CST a total of 12 times and gone back to school.

Miesh continued to emphasize the power of positive thinking and how she used it with her three children, continuing to theorize on the power of emotion to drive change and the power of people to support you in achieving your goals: "Confidence has a lot to do with when you PROVE yourself to anybody, like you know it's confidence that you have in you." Here, using grammatical agency to demonstrate the effects of confidence, "You prove yourself," Miesh demonstrates how she links confidence to continuing to pursue her dreams. In the spring of 2019, with encouragement from her math tutoring cohort, Miesh returned to school, which would inevitably entail resuming testing.

> I was thinking about all the different age levels that the women in there were and they were still TRYing, they were going to still keep going. So I think that gave me a little insight^ and then I just started thinking about well you know, you're not going to spend, you're not OLD. I'm still young. I can't spend the rest of my life just you know not wanting to do what my DREAM was so I just slowly but surely I started picking myself up and getting myself in a ROUtine and then I started at the end of May 2019. I said, "No I'm gonna go back," so I contacted my school and they said all these different regulations I had to do and seems like a LOT but I just kept praying on it and I said I'll get through it and I got through it.

Here, Miesh demonstrated grammatical agency that resulted from her observations of other women of her tutoring cohort, which gave her "insight" and eventually helped her to start "picking myself up and getting myself in a routine." This led to her decision to go back to school, leading to more active change initiated by her, "so I contacted my school,

and they all said these different regulations I had to do." Understanding the school's bureaucratic role listing regulations she "had to do," Miesh enlisted more positive thinking, which led to more agentive actions and positive outcomes, "but I just kept praying on it and I said I'll get through it and I got through it."

Like other teachers in this study, Miesh identified herself as qualified, because others identified her strengths as a teacher, but she was uniquely validated in this:

> When I became the FACE of UPK (laughs), Um, my boss tells me that somebody is coming from the city to take PICtures, just act your usual day.… We were sitting there playing, and the guy comes in and snaps pictures, you know whatever, but I'm trying to get away from the camera man actually. I didn't want to be in no pictures! And then, when I get [up], he kept following me, and I'm like "What am I doing?" and he keeps following me (laughs) so after he left, me and my co-teacher was speaking and he was like "No he's following you because he knows, he feels that you know what you are doing."

Miesh's photo subsequently became one of the most popular stock images used in UPK's early advertising. Her face was on bus stops, billboards, and the internet. Her kids and friends would stop and snap photos with her in front of these images and share them on Facebook. This external validation is marked by Miesh's not wanting to be photographed, perhaps embarrassed by her everyday work being positioned as exceptional. She moved, but the photographer kept "following," demonstrating the photographer as framing Miesh as a qualified teacher, both literally and figuratively. Miesh's reflections on this unique experience of external validation and identity-making demonstrate her pride in her teaching quality and how it permeates everything she does; thus, being the "face of UPK" draws into relief the irony that she is not certified.

What Teachers' Words and Actions Manifested: How Professional Resistance Leads to Change

Teachers in the above examples used their words to push against normative discourses in their relative settings. For Barbie, this involved using performative

discourses dynamically with her own ethos of reflection to achieve positive ratings from her DOE evaluator; whereas for Maria, it has required her, and her mother's, exhausting confrontations with hierarchical systems of power in education since she was a young child. Maria reflected her agency, despite the abusive challenges she has faced since childhood, as she begged her mother to stop working so she could help Maria with her homework; it continued in college, when she and other Latina students were being shut out from the speech pathology track at Bronx U. Shopno pushed back against individual biases to draw attention to the larger humanity of children and families in schools where she taught, effecting positive change in service of greater understanding of diverse children and families and a more welcoming environment for them.

In regard to teacher certification testing, Joy and Miesh both pushed against the prevailing discourse that they were failures, albeit in different ways. Joy engaged in critical resistance, naming many problems with the tests and highlighting that they, not she, were the problem. Moreover, she pushed against Eurocentric epistemologies as the important knowledge for ECE teachers to know, and she emphasized that what she needs to know and be able to do is work with children to construct knowledge about their own families and cultures. With trial and error, Miesh employed positive self-talk in order to manifest behaviors responsive to the onset of depression caused by failing the math exam for teaching 12 times. She saw herself as agentive in her words and responded accordingly, despite the harsh exclusions precipitated by her failure in math. Though not a romantic narrative, she epitomizes the importance of reframing in order to move on in the midst of a racially oppressive system. Finally, she leveraged being the "face of UPK" as a symbol of her strengths and motivation as an ECE teacher.

Just as we see examples of teachers' grammatical agency, even when they are being positioned and positioning themselves in terms of normative and situated frames, in section one of this chapter, in this section, teachers who were actively resisting were also constrained by normative discourses and situated morals as they constructed their

counter-narratives. It is important to recognize that in highlighting teachers' deployment of a range of grammatical and framing agencies, my focus has been on how they have experienced tests individually. These narratives are necessarily messy, pointing out teachers' intersectional minoritization (Souto-Manning, 2018) while considering how they counter oppression and make meaning of the discourses that pervade their lives. These unique individual counter-narratives are an important response to CRT's tenets in centering individual experience and calling for justice. Moreover, while these counter-/narratives are individual instantiations of the effects of more pervasive problems, they draw attention to the impossibility of naming and describing the breadth of teachers' unique experiences of systemic racism.

It is only in looking at these individual narratives that we gain a greater sense of the depths and effects of certification tests on teachers; even when they are making meaning of their quality inside the classroom, apart from the tests, testing haunts them and casts more than a shadow on the accurate representation of their teaching quality. Combined with other forms of racism and discrimination, this presents a call to action in the form of intersectional justice (Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018) for teachers. In concluding this chapter, below I examine immediate specific implications for CRT as seen through the lens of teachers' unique individual counter-narratives.

The Limits of Constructing Tests as Racist in Individual Interviews

Teachers resisted asserting that the tests were systemically racist, because as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the protection of whiteness (Picower, 2009) manifested in the interviews. Faye felt comfortable airing some of her deficit views of children and families, and Precious, at this chapter's opening, waited to share a test result with me during an interview recording—highlighting our shared experience in the certification test and test preparation space. Protection of whiteness aside, it is still possible to

interpret how, in the individual interviews, teachers manifested a critique of systems of certification that implicate the racial bias of New York State tests for teacher certification. By returning to the tenets of CRT, the connections become clear.

From a CRT perspective, conspicuously missing from across teachers' explicit counter-/narratives is the commitment I and other CRT scholars have made to the centrality of race and racism and attention to its ordinary and everyday effects. Understanding race to be a central aspect of oppression is an ideological commitment, and therefore it is understandable—though in need of further analysis—that teachers do not hold that commitment in narrating their experiences. In this regard, several of the teachers esteem the intersections of race and ethnicity with diverse cultures as assets to their communities; they therefore see racial/ethnic identity as factors among many that *positively* contribute to their powerfully diverse classroom teaching experiences. Troubling race/ethnicity in that respect might be therefore difficult for them to do.

Consistent with the research on CRT methodology, my whiteness and thus, my total lack of shared firsthand experience, caused teachers to be more reticent in their critiques of exams and certification as explicitly racist than they were in the focus group interviews, as I will discuss in Chapters VI and VII. However, it is also true that the everyday nature of racism can make it difficult to name explicitly, because it inheres in systems and structures of oppression and remains hidden in plain sight. This is most apparent in Precious's many descriptions of the tests as a "noose around her neck" and other wrenching metaphors that call to mind Jim Crow and slavery. When asked directly on multiple occasions following the use of such descriptions whether she thought the tests were racist, Precious mitigated her responses to essentially say she would not go that far. Across teachers' counter-/narratives, such mitigation is repeated, suggesting that teachers reserve words such as *racist* and *racism* for extreme circumstances and specific contexts.

Though in this research study I take a critical/race critical stance, for better or worse, I purposefully designed it to be descriptive rather than normative. I am seeking to ascertain how teachers, on their own, with me, and with one another, co/construct counter-/narratives of failure and quality; and therefore, I established broad openness to how teachers label tests and other normative standards for ECE quality as unfair. Nevertheless, in looking at teachers' counter-/narratives considering the ways systematic racism makes itself invisible and therefore evade critique, teachers' non-acceptance or non-use of the word *racist* to describe testing likely confirms rather than dismisses a need for robust application of CRT to analyzing teachers' experiences using CNA. In Chapter V, continuing to explore how racism is endemic and how teacher failure is systematic rather than individual, I engage in CNA of themes that span across teachers' individual interviews, and in Chapter VI, I will examine how teachers' co-construction of counter-narratives in the focus group provided opportunities for them to get closer to labeling the systems of testing and measuring of quality as racist.

Due to the limits of space, I can only present here a fraction of teachers' complex narratives. However, because many of their narratives overlapped, it is possible to present some of their counter-narratives collectively. In Chapter V, I present prescient counter-narratives that overlapped across their individual interviews and a summary of the findings from across the individual interviews. In Chapter VI, which addresses teachers' focus group interviews. I explore problems that teachers collectively revisited in the focus-group setting. Using conversational analysis with CNA, I will also examine their co-constructed meaning making about the problem of teacher certification in Chapter VI.

Chapter V

TEACHERS' OVERLAPPING COUNTER-NARRATIVES

Notwithstanding teachers' unique moral stances on major issues related to becoming certified, many of the themes that spanned across their individual interviews allowed them to critically situate common, overlapping criticisms of the existing system of ECE teacher certification in New York and recast their teaching quality as counter-narratives. In the first section of this chapter, I center teachers' broad criticality to examine what is most important to them across their critiques of certification. Consistent with the first part of my second research question, I sought to understand how they construct the problem of ECE teacher certification in New York. To that end, I begin with an in-depth review of two of the most common criticisms of the exams. Though not comprehensive of all their criticisms, the following themes, "It's All About the Money" and "The Trouble with Math," cut across individual counter-/narratives of experience and therefore offer a powerful way forward in analyzing teachers' experiences in accounting for the normalcy of racism as manifested in certification tests. I conclude this chapter with an analysis of teachers' counter-narratives of and recommendations for determining teaching quality in an effort to begin to disentangle notions of quality from certification.

First, to analyze teachers' criticisms, I engage in a brief review of relevant critical theoretical frames. In doing so, I respond to CRT's call for using interdisciplinarity as a way of strengthening analysis. I also unveil the ways in which teachers' experiences reflect systemic racism, even though they were hesitant to name them as such.

Teacher Licensure Testing and Reproduction in Teacher Education

Consistent with CRT, in this study, I engage with "related critical theories"—interdisciplinary research that yields explanatory power to the phenomena of race and racism in everyday life. Holding race and racism to be central to how Teachers of Color experience certification bias in their careers, I understand that other critical theories help to illuminate teachers' intersectional experiences as Black, African American, Afro-Latina, Caribbean, and South Asian women. Below, I examine how other critical theories are a useful complement to CRT in the analysis of teachers' primary critiques of the system of testing teachers in New York State.

Many teachers identified that money is a key factor in how they experience the cycles of failure that exist in testing and certification. At least three teachers used either "waste of time" or "waste of money" to describe their engagement with testing experiences in contrast to their depictions of meaningful learning and how they use it in their teaching daily. Their arguments about the kinds of knowledge needed for teaching ECE informs much of how they believe their quality should be assessed as ECE teachers. In this analysis, I connect Mensah and Jackson's (2018) CRT analysis of elementary pre-service Teachers of Colors' experiences of science learning with the literature rejecting Eurocentric epistemologies in ECE and thus offer an important connection that bridges the critique of Eurocentric certification tests with teachers' counter-narratives of teaching quality as presented in this chapter. In particular, I consider how teachers' criticisms that the tests, especially the math test, are irrelevant to their work with young children—as particular interlocking oppressions that then map onto teachers' intersectionally minoritized (Souto-Manning, 2018) identities. This broader connection in favor of culturally relevant critical multicultural teaching and teacher preparation serves to further reject the false narrative that ECE teachers are unqualified.

Scholars of Color such as Mensah and Jackson (2018) and Dixson and Rousseau (2005) have been foremost in the critique of the generational effects of culturally irrelevant teaching and learning, particularly in reference to the preparation of Teachers of Color, but Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) critical sociology, as a complementary frame, also deserves attention in this regard because of their attention to the role of language in establishing, maintaining, and reproducing cultural hegemony. As depicted in Chapter II, in their critical sociological archival research of the elite bourgeois class in 19th century France, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) demonstrate how institutional discourses serve those in power who engage in a work of overt abstraction and generalization of complex ideas and problems. Such institutions create a normative, generic framing for discourses of power that in effect extracts theory from the experiential, making it only accessible to the elite. As a result**,** "bourgeois language can be adequately handled only by those who, thanks to the School, have been able to convert their practical mastery … into a second-degree aptitude for the quasi-scholarly handling of language" (p. 115). Thus, Freire's (1970/1993) and subsequent critical pedagogues' refusal to extract theory from critical praxis is no coincidence. It is therefore important to notice both the oppression and the absurdity in such a proposition.

In my analysis, I examine how this special language of school helps account for why teachers in this research study are positioned as failures and do technically fail some certification exams. Just as teachers in Mensah and Jackson's (2018) study felt that science was "foreign or like another world" (p. 9), teachers in this study largely do not connect with math. As will be seen in the analysis of data, there is a critique that teachers do not teach higher level math, and therefore they should not be tested on it. While I agree with such criticism, it is nevertheless important to draw attention to the reproductive and generational effects on students and Teachers of Color who have been historically disengaged from so-called content curricula. This is especially important for

those who become Teachers of Color in generalist areas such as elementary, early childhood, and special education.

Moreover, it is important to note the intersectionally unjust (Souto-Manning, 2018) harm caused by the ways in which patriarchy and capitalism intersect with the work of teachers and how they get rewarded and/or punished (Anderson, 2019) for their work in the field. As discussed in Chapter IV, at least one teacher in this study came to associate math with "something that wasn't a good feeling" as a result of her military father's competitive (Deslandes, 2002) and internally racist (Kendi, 2019) discourse, which made her feel like she was a "dumb daughter." Just as preservice Teachers of Color in Mensah and Jackson's (2018) study wrestled with how to form a science teacher identity when the prevailing discourses said that only White males can be scientists and, moreover, they had no "right" to access science for its use and enjoyment, teachers in this study did not enjoy most math classes. They "looked at [math] as a requirement and not as an enjoyment" (p. 19). Though Mensah and Jackson are focused on science teacher use, access, enjoyment, and identity, teachers in this dissertation study display similar attitudes about learning math. It is important to note that several teachers recounted enjoying math as fun in elementary school or having one or two excellent math teachers. With the exception of Shopno, they also enjoyed their ECE math methodology coursework—because they had access to use it and make it applicable. On the whole, however, they were excluded from math and positioned themselves as not being good at math. Only one teacher out of the 10 teachers included in this study, Maria, displayed a positive math teaching identity.

The High Cost of Certification Exams: "It's All About the Money"

It is far outside of the scope of this dissertation study to examine with adequate depth the ways in which teachers struggle financially, because they are not paid

appropriately for the work they do, but it is worth noting that several of the teachers discussed their low wages, and at least three of them experienced demotion or perpetual low pay due to not being certified. Teachers' low wages also serve as an important backdrop to why this dissertation study matters and how the cycle of poverty and low income is reproduced through the mechanism of testing and, in the case of racially minoritized teachers, the antecedent racism as perpetuated in post-*Brown* policies intended to exclude them from the profession. In terms of a CRT analysis of findings, the larger historical backdrop where "obstacles that discourage the recruitment of [racially minoritized] teachers into the field are erected and reinforced daily" (p. 391) is also pertinent. According to Hudson and Holmes (1994),

> The limited presence and dwindling supply of African American teachers in the public school system has been attributed to…African American teacher candidates' low scores on competency tests, their disproportionate failure to meet *revised certification requirements*, declining teacher salaries in the 1970s due to the surplus of teachers, African Americans' increasing access to better-paying jobs…and the decreasing amount of financial aid available to teacher education students. (p. 391, emphasis added)

To be clear, teachers' experiences exist on a spectrum. Whereas Destiny described the process as "torture," here Miesh positions it as "a lot"—an unfair hassle, especially for teachers who are not being paid as professionals.

> I also think that the testing, as far as going through certification, is a long process, a very broad process, too. Because not only does it cost a lot to pay for your certificate, pay for your fingerprinting, uhm, some people that are not already in teaching positions, they have to pay for workshops. Plus all the studying that you have to do with, as far as college tuition and take exams that you have to pay for those, too. And then you're not reimbursed. I think that that's a lot ... Asking for a lot, for a person that is not even receiving top dollar.

Important in teachers' counter-narratives about tests is their sense of agency when discussing their critiques and experiences of the exams from the perspective of money. In this example, Miesh uses a collective or universal "you" in the subject or the third person "some people," in the subject/object positions while clearly identifying with these

selfsame descriptions. The collective stance that she takes allows her to do what many teachers do in expressing their disgust over this taxing process: "… that's … asking a lot, for a person that is not even receiving top dollar." Many teachers go beyond their experiences in critiquing macro structures of exams. In fact, they feel strongly that it is a "money-making thing" for test makers. Of all the cross themes I address in Chapter V, this is the most common experience among teachers who participated in the study. Here, I address some of teachers' most prescient critiques of the costs to them and the profits extracted (Anderson, 2019) by test makers from these teachers.

Counter-Narrative #1: The Cost of Certification to Teachers

Both Miesh and Destiny reported sustained negative impacts on their physical and mental health as a result of the cycle of failing tests. While Miesh was subdued, saying it was "a lot," Destiny did not hold back. In fact, she demonstrated some of her strongest emotions as she described the relationship of the fiscal cost to the burden it created.

> As a teacher already we don't make enough (laughs) and then given this test, we're like you're failing, gotta repeat it again, pay for this like, like and people are already it's not like we fresh out of college, stuff like that. People have families to take care of. Some people who going through a lot. And they don't have the money to like take all these, it's like SO much, like people get overwhelmed and get sick over this. I see a lot of people, like one person who I saw, I remember she was like doing the exams and then I didn't see her anymore and then she like said she got sick. Like, like it really takes a toll on people's life!

More specifically, in her second interview, Destiny said, "It's like torture," and in one excerpt she described how the cycle wore her down (something Miesh had described as a "build-up"), providing more context on why she did not trust the state, as exemplified in her individual theme in Chapter IV.

> The thing is I paid so much money in workshops^ for exams, so it was like it was at one point that I just gave up. I used to tell [my director], "I'm not taking any more tests, because I'm paying too much money out of my pocket to pay for workshops and to pay then, turn around and to pay for exams." And I felt like it was like TORture.

> Cause I was like Oooh I paid all this money for the workshop and then now I go take this exam, and I thought I was like prepped and ready for it and then I come this close … so I was like, it was like torture to me, and I remember, oh I also stayed out a couple months, out of Selah, because then you couldn't come back in until you pass, cause it was (inaudible) you need a certain amount of credits and they said you have to pass this test, yeah you had to pass the A-L-S-T to continue on in your classes. So, I sat out for a whole couple months not going to school, because I had to prep to take the A-L-S-T, trying to pass it so I could go back to school, and then^ [my director] one day comes in and tell me how Selah changed the rules now. If you get a B in one of your classes, they said that the A-L-S-T got a safety net now, so that's how I ended up going back to school.

Here, Destiny demonstrated surprising grammatical agency, given the circumstances, stating that she "paid so much money in workshops," attended workshops, and "gave up." She even declared to her boss, "I'm not taking any more tests!" Contrasted with that grammatical agency, however, is her statement, "And I felt like it was torture," dragging out and emphasizing the first syllable as transcribed above. Framing the testing process as having power to torture her, Destiny highlights how she made difficult decisions in the face of this cycle to end the torture. This included yielding to Selah's control over her education. After accepting her into their program and accepting (or extracting) her borrowed money, they, like other schools, insisted that she pass the new A-L-S-T exam before she would be allowed to finish her course of study with them. Suddenly, this austere measure by the school was lifted (not by Selah but the state), and she could use a safety net to gain permission to return to school and finish her master's.

Consistent with statewide lower passing rates on this exam, only three of the 10 teachers in this study (Cee, Joy, and Miesh) passed the ALST before the state introduced the safety net and eventually removed the requirement, but everyone took this exam more than once before the safety net was introduced, and then it went away. This is the precarious pendulum so many of the teachers hated and resented most. For Destiny, it meant that she could not trust the state in any of its declarations, not even her certification. Many of the other teachers made the conclusion, based on constant changes,

that teacher testing was driven by profit motives in their analyses of the tests. Reflective of the rejection of a meritocracy, this counter-narrative demonstrates how costly exams operate in tandem with "revised certification requirements" (Hudson & Holmes, 1994, p. 391) to keep teachers locked out of the profession.

Counter-Narrative #2: The Bureaucracy of Certification "Extracts" a Toll

One day at the end of an interview with Maria, I asked the perfunctory, "Is there anything else you want to talk about related to testing in general?" Such questions are usually met with silence, but Maria chimed in, "The government is taking our money (laughs)! That's how I feel!" She elaborated:

> You know, we take these exams more than once. Then by the time we do finish, then something else changes and then you have to retake the other exam. So it's like, you know ... I know that a lot of ... People that have had difficulties with that feel like, "Oh, they're just taking our money. We're never going to get certified and we're just going to be retaking exams for the rest of our lives!"

Mercedes went so far as to say that the colleges and the test makers were "in bed together." She argued, persuasively, that if colleges are able to force people to take extra classes in order to prepare for exams and/or if they can require that students complete their master's before taking any exams and/or hold their recommendations for certification until teachers pass exams, it keeps teachers tethered to their schools for longer. She said it was "mind-boggling that they're saying you can't graduate! That's how it was. You can't get a master's if you're not certified. If you don't pass all your exams." In the interview, I reflected aloud comparing Bronx U to what other schools like Selah were doing in holding teachers back (as had been the case for Destiny). Mercedes challenged my reasoning in this short excerpt from Interview I.

Gail: So they're holding the degree until you pass—

Mercedes: I'm gonna find out tomorrow.

Gail: ... your exam? Yeah. Yeah, that would make sense. That's what Selah and some of the other [colleges]—

Mercedes: REALLY?

Gail: ... are doing. Yeah. But Selah it's kind of worse because they will say 18 credits, you've paid all this money to Selah and you get to 18 credits and you can't pass or say the EAS, they won't let you finish taking your classes. But you've already paid to take credits at Selah.

Mercedes: And so it's not related to money? They're not in bed together? I believe they are.

Reflecting on her situation with passing old exams but needing credits and being forced into the new test regime, she added, "If a person's already passed exams that were required, why do they have to take new exams? and, if you're gonna use the old exams as safety nets, it has to be about money!" Mercedes employed different versions of this refrain, many times over the course of two different interviews, but she was not the only one. Several of the teachers complained about the costs of tests and the bureaucracy of testing. Faye suggested that all the costs and preparation be encompassed as part of the degree program:

> I was thinking that since we pay so much money to go to college, these exams should be part of the college course…. As long as you are doing education, whether it is early childhood, elementary^, or secondary, you know that should be done at the college level and be a part of the course that you're doing, instead of having to come out and pay this money. You pay all of that for college. You finish all of those courses, you have your degree. But you're not certified.

Finally, both Joy and Precious highlighted a bureaucratic dimension of testing that is of particular interest here and relates powerfully to the profits Pearson extracts as the chief teacher certification purveyor across many states in the United States. They both complained that the tests are too general, and they never know what to study. When I asked Joy directly why she thinks certification tests exist, she was quick to answer, "Honestly? Money. And it's like I don't have anything to study. Their study guides are

basically HOW to take the test. I know HOW to take the test, it's just what to study for the test," and Precious echoed this sentiment:

> I feel like it's money-making thing cause every time you fail, you gotta pay to do it again. They don't really tell you specifically what you need to target more than they give you like the general "You got a two in this area, one in this area, you got a three." So it's like you don't know really what to target.

Here, Precious demonstrates a unique and important moment of framing agency that draws attention to how teachers ultimately feel helpless and at the mercy of the state, their schools of education, and Pearson: "They don't really tell you specifically what you need to target more than give you … you got a two … you got a three." As discussed, many of the teachers, when critiquing exams, do demonstrate grammatical agency as they stand up for themselves and do what they need to survive, but they cannot move forward professionally or achieve pay parity without their certification. It begs the question, given that the discourse is so normative regarding the prevalence of high-stakes professional exams, "What are the alternatives to such exams for ECE teachers?" I directly answer this question from the data in Chapter VII, as the most accessible, least bureaucratic, solutions require little in the way of analysis.

From the perspective of CRT, the details of this counter-narrative show how time and money are extracted from teachers through mechanisms of testing and certification that obfuscate what it takes to be successful. Because of the historically disproportionate failure of Teachers of Color on such exams, since these exams have cut-off scores that are norm referenced based arbitrarily on a bell curve rather than criterion-referenced, this additional unnecessary burden of concealment further alienates teachers from successful completions of exams, and subsequently, due to some school of education's policies, the completion of degrees as well. In addition to rejecting the counter-narrative of race neutrality and providing a specific representation of the more pervasive problem of racial capitalism (Anderson, 2019), this counter-narrative is informed by the interdisciplinary

literature on opportunity structures for poor (Hogan, 1996) and racially minorized (Grant-Thomas & Powell, 2014) professionals. Below, I analyze other prevailing counter-narratives critiquing the math exams, building on Cee's theme in Chapter IV.

The Trouble with Math

With the exception of Maria, a self-described "math genius" who tutored in math, across individual interviews and the focus group, all other teachers identified the math exam as an acute obstacle on their journeys to becoming certified. This provides a partial accounting for the relief that Precious experienced after finally passing her math exam, as presented at the beginning of Chapter IV. Here, I focus on teachers' histories with teaching and learning math and their criticisms that the Content Specialty Test (CST) Math exam does not align with the math they teach in ECE classrooms.

Counter-Narrative #3: The Math Exam is Not Relevant to Early Childhood

Teachers' criticisms of the math exam mirrored their criticisms of the other high-stakes exams as not being hands-on enough, but their criticisms were more acute and often relayed a similar sentiment: whereas some practical skills can be extrapolated from most of the other exams, there is very little hands-on application on the math exam, because the content knowledge tested is so far afield from ECE math. As Precious noted,

> As a PreK teacher, as a teacher that has a degree with Birth to second grade, why am I doing a lot of algebra? I'm not using that. I think they don't [give] a test for what YOU actually are looking to do in your career and looking at what you're teaching. Yes, they have questions on there that has scenarios of what would be done as a PreK teacher and stuff like that, but with the math I just feel like the math is just a big GENERal. So, even if your degree is first to sixth grade, you're taking the same test, and I just think that's unfair.

Precious utterly rejects that she needs algebra for teaching first grade: "I'm not using that," and frames test makers as the culprit: "They don't give a test for what you are

actually looking to do." Her critique of the math as a big "general" is telling, because it demonstrates something echoed across many complaints that teachers gave regarding the unfairness of the exams—the content matter is too broad and abstract to apply to their area of focus, because there is such a wide gap in teaching first grade and what is tested. Moreover, she cites the more age-appropriate applied portion of the tests and the essay-based scenarios as being more acceptable than the content portions of the exams. Other teachers also powerfully mentioned the scenarios as being portions of the test that they *always* passed. Most notably, Cee and Miesh, both teachers who had difficulties with math in high school, pointed out that they did well on the essay portion of the math exam, where teachers are called upon to identify a child's problem with learning math and make recommendations for addressing the child's challenge.

As discussed in Chapter IV, Cee said besides the applied portion of the test, the math test was nothing like her ECE math methods course where she learned "ways to teach Geometry … do patterns with them," etc.—pedagogical content knowledge that she actually uses in her teaching with students. Despite their applied knowledge and skills, most teachers do not pass the exam overall, and because they do not pass the exam overall, they have to keep retaking it to obtain a passing score; and, as long as they are retaking this exam, they are being paid on an uncertified salary scale.

Indeed, teachers in this study generally feel at ease in working with anything that can be applied to their everyday lives, and especially their teaching, but they bristle at decontextualized assessments of their knowledge and teaching quality. This can be seen in multiple contexts as described by teachers' experiences, not just in testing, but when they encounter education professors who reproduce the dominant ideology about the kinds of knowledge needed for teaching excellence. In advocating for her teaching quality with one such education professor, Shopno demonstrated that when contextualized, even that professor came to value her math teaching quality, despite his many normative assumptions tying abstract math content knowledge to teaching quality.

While Shopno was going through her divorce with her children's father, she had particular difficulty with a math methodology professor who taught a grade range generalist course that rarely touched upon early childhood—with the exception of videos that he showed of his toddler son engaging in sensory activities at a beach. She articulated her reduced agency in his presence, saying that he "picked on" her. Shopno recounted their tumultuous classroom relationship based on one heated exchange when she asked aloud in class, "As early childhood person, why you teaching me … all this six grader all math and explanation….because you said otherwise I'm not ready, [why] I'm not ready?" She was expressing frustration, because he made a not-so-subtle whole class comment after one of their prior exchanges:

> "I can't understand how people get hired … when people don't understand math at this level how people get hired in early childhood." Not to me, but he just in general …because before two second before he did something like he argue something with me and then say to the class. Of course. I can say he meant [it] to me.

The instructor often became frustrated with Shopno, because she questioned his authority, brought in pictures of her two-year-old class engaging in sensory activities but not making "messes"—like his son in the videos—and sought to apply course content to her early childhood experience in discussion. Though the professor assigned Shopno a grade of C for the course overall (citing that she was late to class and never read), even he was stunned by her practicum reflections, for which he assigned her a grade of A.

> And he give me full number for my fieldwork and he said this the one thing you did best. Now tell me with this that compliment and the fieldwork if I can understand the whole scenario of early childhood, how I did the fieldwork, how fieldwork requirement math early childhood should I give all my reflection…all three days, observation and reflection, and he give me my full marks, and he said, "Wow! you understand very well early childhood math observation classroom and you did your reflection I give you full marks." Same professor!

Implied in Shopno's rhetorical phrasing, "if I can understand … how I did the fieldwork," is the question, "If you agree that I know my field, how can you stand in front of the

classroom and belittle me, saying you do not understand how some people (implying me) get hired as early childhood teachers?" This important grammatically agentive hypothetical pushback highlights the tension between how teachers experience top-down decontextualized perceptions of what should be expected of them compared with what they daily achieve as interdisciplinary early childhood teachers and how they believe their knowledge and skills should be assessed. Thus, the dominant narrative contested by teachers in this counter-narrative represents a rejection of Eurocentric epistemologies that presume their own objectivity. Instead, drawing on their individual experience, teachers provide a framework for what high quality teachers should actually know and be able to do. This also aligns with Mensah and Jackson's (2018) assertion that some content knowledge is presented in ways that make it irrelevant to teachers. Also, teachers' counter-narratives powerfully align with Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol's (2018) disruption of Eurocentric approaches and epistemologies in the teaching of young children particularly.

Counter-Narrative #4: Teachers Have Experienced a "Gap in Service"

Some of the teachers began to have trouble with math once the stakes had been raised for these exams, but others, like Cee, as discussed in Chapter IV, had always had difficulties with math. Miesh, Destiny, and Joy also reported having difficulty with math at the elementary and/or secondary level, and Cee, Miesh, and Destiny had particular trouble with passing the required math for graduation. As described above, at the time Cee was in high school, she was able to take the bookkeeping track and still graduate with a regular diploma. Miesh reported finally passing the math Regents exam the last time she could have taken it in order to be officially included in her high school graduation rosters, and Destiny had the requirement waived by completing an unrelated internship-based class that presumably prepared her to thrive vocationally. Across these narratives, I identified a range of intersectional injustices (Souto-Manning & Rabadi-

Raol, 2018) at the heart of their protracted math failure. Nevertheless, as argued by Hilliard (2004), there are few obstacles that African American young people face that excellent teaching cannot remedy. This is not to say that teachers should bear the full onus of student achievement, but excellent teaching, empowered by equitable material resources for schooling, including significant access to invested teachers, is an important salve that helps to address many academic problems that children in PK-12 schools face. The lack of that salve is what Hillard refers to as the "quality-of-service gap" (p. 140).

In exploring this counter-narrative, I show how teachers' experiences reject the dominant ideology that they have received equal opportunities in their education. This is further confirmed in the descriptions provided by Mensah and Jackson (2018) who draw on Harris's (1993) conception of the property value of whiteness to show how some multi-subject content area teachers have been denied the right to use and enjoyment of STEM subjects including science and math. Finally, a denial of equal opportunities in education includes not only the concrete gap in service of teaching that they have received but also the historical lack of Teachers of Color using culturally relevant approaches to educate their students and model STEM content knowledge identities (Mensah & Jackson, 2018). As Hilliard (2004) shows, the profession is lacking enough teachers who can adequately prepare low-income students of Color.

Consistent with arguments by Mensah and Jackson (2018) and Dixson and Rousseau (2005), teachers in this study encountered gaps in service that disenfranchised them in a system of generational exclusions from the culture of power associated with math and science. Like teachers in the study by Mensah and Jackson (2018), the cycle began with not being connected to the subject matter in high school. As a result, teachers in my study "opted out" (p. 11) of more difficult math classes in high school, with Cee opting for a bookkeeping alternative and Destiny being placed in a vocational internship in order to meet graduation requirements. Her placement was in a nursing home, and this gave Destiny an opportunity for hands-on experiences, which she enjoyed, but she

regretted not learning high school math. Once the K-12 student becomes a preservice Teacher of Color, the cycle becomes a second generational issue:

> Destiny: Yeah^. And that's what happened. I had a whole from January to June, nothing about math just went to this program. So when I went to college and took the test, to get into the college, I failed.
>
> Gail: You failed it.
>
> Destiny: The math … the intro to math.
>
> Gail: You failed the class or the test?
>
> Destiny: The test. The intro like to get in.
>
> Gail: So did you take
>
> Destiny: Yep, what is called remedial math?
>
> Gail: I don't like the word, but yeah.
>
> Destiny: Yeah, that's what it's called. And I failed that, like I took that and failed that four times before I got into the regular math.

In this excerpt, Destiny used grammatical agency to say that she failed, but she also drew attention to being excluded from regular math. Destiny's intersectionally minoritized identities factored into and worsened her experience of failure.

In college, Destiny had the opportunity to sit in on one-on-one tutoring sessions with a peer who had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), because the student invited her to join. Destiny posited that she might have needed some minor accommodations but never received them in high school, because her immigrant mother did not know what an IEP was and therefore would not have known where to start in advocating for her daughter. Because Destiny likely experienced some gaps in quality teaching service, she was given a quick fix in the form of taking an internship class rather than being given access to math content knowledge at a more advanced level. It is also worth noting that when asked, Destiny also reported having had an ill-equipped fifth grade teacher who beleaguered students with racially laden labels and criticisms of their performance and

behavior. Instead of engaging with increasingly complex math, Destiny and her classmates were besieged with deficit labels echoing the dominant discourses that they were problems at risk rather than children at promise (Swadener, 2010).

Notably, across counter-narratives, teachers' experience of a gap in service most often related to their learning from fifth grade and up. Moreover, consistent also with Ladson-Billings' (2006) conception of an education debt, Destiny's math failure accumulated with material effects (Bell, 1980; Guinier, 2004). Keep in mind Destiny reported having $70,000 in debt, in part because her undergraduate training took six years instead of four years, likely tied to her failing remedial math.

Teachers' experience of a gap in service in and beyond fifth grade is also indicative of the increasing extraction of knowledge from practice as the disciplines become streamlined (Foucault, 1977) and children are not learning in interdisciplinary primary contexts anymore. This is reflected in teachers' comfort with everyday math, as expressed in several additional counter-narratives—too many to represent here. For example, Destiny reported that most computation was easy for her, but when she began to encounter word problems, she began to fail, "When I worked as a cashier, you couldn't tell me nothing about money … I was able to compute numbers and do…. But then like I guess just like word problems like just threw me off." Here, Destiny ironically reverses grammatical agency, "You couldn't tell me," to emphasize her confidence as a cashier and with everyday math sense. Then, she demonstrates a reduced grammatical agency in the expected sense to say word problems "threw" her off.

Destiny's frustration with abstract math is tied to another refrain I heard from several teachers more generally. Though she regretted not learning advanced math in high school, Destiny was "happy to have the [internship], like it was hands on." Pointing out two sides of the same coin, Destiny mirrors many teachers' identities as practical and preferring hands-on experiences across the lifespan, especially in teaching early childhood math.

Like Destiny, several of the teachers made reference to their number sense and math competency when applied. Cee worked as a cashier for the court system for 10 years, and she owned and operated her own small business for a time before becoming a family worker. Joy worked for Shanghai Bank on Wall Street for 10 years, and her job was to process international ACH transactions. In that role, she was solely responsible for posting transactions as large as $99 billion. As you can see, across the data, teachers' preference for applied experiences, including with math, is inextricably tied to how they want to be evaluated as early childhood math teachers. Furthermore, their critiques are rooted in systems and structures of oppression, which are cyclical and have generational effects, creating both psychological and material harm (Guinier, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2004). Tying teachers' lack of access to advanced math content knowledge is important, as it draws attention to the ways in which most STEM subjects are often not made relevant to the lives of PK-12 students in schools. A few exceptions from this data demonstrate the importance of culturally embedded STEM teaching across the lifespan.

Joy shared that in middle school, she loved math, because she had a passionate math teacher who made it fun and relevant.

> I LOVED math back then, now I don't (laughs), but I loved it back then because of the way she taught it, it wasn't just the ritual everybody 2 + 2, 3+3, 4 like that; it wasn't like that. It was more of using manipulatives and getting us to actually engage and do stuff with it so you saw what that math really meant as opposed to just hearing it 'cause me I'm a visual learner so with me I had to see it back then.

Here, Joy positions herself as having a positive math identity in middle school. Using grammatical agency, she repeated that she loved math and then she positioned herself as the object of her teacher's brilliant quality, which integrated content knowledge with hands-on situated experiences that Joy could see, because she identifies as a "visual learner." This teacher is very much like Carrie Secret, a teacher "at the center of the Ebonics controversy" profiled by Hilliard (2004, p. 152). Aside from Secret's many culturally sustaining practices, such as seeing "herself as a member of the families of all

her students" (p. 152), Secret's classes are scholarly, inspiring, and "full of movement and action, much of it collective" (p. 153). If students are actively engaged in their own rigorous learning and the learning is not abstracted from practical reality, then teaching excellence can capture the imagination and minds of students often labeled "at risk." Thus, systematic failure of PK-12 schools to make STEM knowledge relevant (Mensah & Jackson, 2018) is an important way that we must understand teachers' failure and frustration with New York State certification tests. In Chapter VII, I will revisit teachers' frustrations with the math exam requirement and provide their recommendations for alternatives pertaining to how they might be assessed more equitably.

Above, I engaged analysis that cut across teachers' individual counter-narratives of what they most often criticized as the problems with ECE teacher certification in New York State. Below, continuing to draw on teachers' individual interviews, I engage in analysis of their overlapping counter-narratives of high quality ECE teaching. In presenting these counter-narratives, I reject the narrative that uncertified teachers are accepting of low standards for their teaching. In fact, many teachers in this study invite high standards, but they seek fair and valid measures to determine their quality, and they establish a very clear stance for how to differentiate the field of childcare from early education. Thus, this final theme will establish context for presenting focus group data that centers teachers' co-created counter-narratives of quality in Chapter VI.

Early Childhood Teaching Quality: How to Differentiate the Field

The most resounding counter-narratives that teachers centered in their individual interviews reflected the quality-of-service they provide to their children in broad and complex ways. In Chapter IV, I demonstrated snapshots of such counter-narratives in the individual themes of Faye, Mercedes, Barbie, Shopno, and Joy. However, all of the teachers in this study presented similar narratives of their effectiveness in working with

their students, as shaped by years of experience. On the whole, they also emphasized their situated personal experiences as members of the community as tantamount to why they are effective in their classrooms. However, due to the number of teachers in this study, it is impossible to present a clear, accurate, and sufficiently detailed depiction of teachers' construction of their situated quality. In the next section, I attempt to redress some of those omissions, bringing together teachers' counter-narratives of their teaching quality—typically constructed in a highly "tellable" (Ochs & Capps, 2001) ways, employing grammatical agency, and framing official designations of quality as false, reductive, and harmful.

Across this research study, having already spent thousands of hours with hundreds of teachers, I believed I had a baseline understanding of how the system for certification needed to change. Though teachers' counter-/narratives proved worse than I imagined, given my lack of shared experience, on the whole the data presented so far are consistent with my own experiences as a consultant on exams. Yet, it was unclear to me what a more just system might entail. Should everyone who wants to be certified be certified? Does such a system work against the worthy goal of equitable professionalization in the ECE field? Teachers provided robust answers. Following probes, teachers were as clear in their assertions about who should be qualified as they were in their critiques of the certification testing. Here, I draw attention to teachers' most common constructions of teaching quality as presented in individual counter-narratives.

Counter-Narrative #5: Differentiating Childcare from Early Childhood Education

Joy, the teacher who attends national research conferences and is always bouncing ideas off colleagues in order to improve her teaching, was challenged by my probes asking her how she would recognize quality. Since many of the teachers in this study are evaluated in their classroom often, I wanted to know how they would evaluate others. Joy had made off-handed remarks indicating that she reads other classrooms quite quickly, so

I asked her to paint a picture of a high-quality classroom. In the long stretch excerpted entirely below due to its significance here, I had just begun a probe asking, "How do you know if someone is qualified to teach early childhood?"

Joy: I don't know. I mean you can only go by what you see and how they classroom is flowing. And if the children actually learning. You really don't know. I can't say they are qualified unless I look at what they are doing (inaudible) they have no clue what they are doing.

Gail: Can you give me an example of when somebody doesn't seem to have a clue? What are the kinds of things that are happening in the classroom?

Joy: They're confused and don't really know what to do in the classroom or how to interact with the child or how to reach that child's level or to understand that this child need extra help, they have no clue. They're just there. They can't get their lesson across and the kids are just gone and they don't realize it. Their attention is not there.

Gail: OK but you can see it when you walk in.

Joy: I can kind of see it.

Gail: If a person has a very overly, I don't know if we should say overly active, but a very active child, what's the difference between a child, an active child, in a class where they are engaged [and an] active child in a class where they're not engaged?

Joy: The active child would be engaged, you would see less of them being active behavior-wise interrupting or whatever, because they have something to do [that's] captivating their attention as opposed to leaving the class where they're not engaging and they just want to (inaudible) and not listening and do whatever they wanna do.

Gail: What about when you walk in a classroom where somebody is qualified what do you see in that classroom?

Joy: Qualified being certified, or?

Gail: How do you define qualified?

Joy: How I define qualified is basically knowing what to do in your room. Yeah having experience and knowing what to do.... So if

> I walk into a room, and I see the children engaged, happy, excited about what they are doing. There's times I walk into a classroom, I ask the teacher a question and the kids be hollering and I say "Wow, what are you guys doing today? What are you doing? What are you learning?" And they're able to feed back and tell me, then that lets me know, OK the teacher did their job. They're basically getting across to them. Like if I walk in a class and they have no clue why they are sitting at the table with their hands in paint, then you know like, you know?

In this excerpt, Joy constructed an image of teaching quality by imagining herself as a guest in someone else's room, and she positioned herself as an agentive observer—someone with the power to determine if there is high-quality learning happening in the space. Her description is complex but elegant in its simplicity. She was not just looking for a progression but argued that the very way you position children—as purposive agents of change and growth over time as opposed to passive recipients of activities—is the signature of high-quality ECE. She prompted me for confirmation, but because I do not have ECE experience, I could not reciprocate. I was fully reliant on her perspective.

Gail: Well I never taught early childhood.

Joy: Really?

Gail: Yes, I taught high school.

Joy: Oh OK.

Gail: So, I'm kind of connecting with what you're saying about the difference when kids are just doing an action versus like it, having an intent with it. What is the difference in that? Like it's just going and rubbing your hands in paint versus like it being a learning experience.

Joy adds on to the connection I made, deepening her description:

> Right, if you don't explain why you're putting this paint on the page and having them rub their hands, or it could be you just trying to get them to learn their colors mix or blend, but you just have them rub their hands and one child says, "I'm rubbing my hands in paint! I'm just rubbing my hands" and the other kid was like "We're making colors!" We can see the difference when you walk in a classroom.

Here, Joy differentiates teaching from childcare based on the linguistic resources the teacher draws upon in order to help the child make meaning of their ongoing actions and connecting theory to practice in their young minds. As one child narrates, “I’m rubbing my hands in paint!” and another says, “I’m making colors,” there is a measurable difference in the level of understanding and meaning making on the part of each child. One child is having fun while the other child is understanding themself as an agent of change—making colors. While the field of ECE is hyper-focused on language (Fincham, 2015), teaching quality as defined by Joy is much more than a matter language, as she continued to describe. Joy differentiated a teacher doing an activity with their children versus a teacher who is actively teaching the child how to make meaning through self-portraiture.

> Or, if everything is carbon copy. Everybody had the same handprint on a piece of paper. You know kids won’t stand still for it to be an exact handprint! So, if you see that you know the teacher did it. It’s teacher directed, it’s not the child…. it’s like you don’t understand that their work has to be their work so if you walk in my room, you’re not going to see all the kids have the exact same thing even though it’s the same activity. It’s going to look totally different. If you walk into another room and see exactly carbon copy, the teacher did it and told them where to put it. His eyes is supposed to be up here, they don’t have to be right here…so he realizes that his two eyes are together … that’s the difference that I’ve seen.

> You have to know the children and know how to get across to them. So, in that sense, you would show them a mirror. Oh, OK where are your eyes? And they go like this. They say “Oh, is it up here?” and then that’s when they get the connection, “Oh my eye doesn’t go up here. It goes right here.” You know, but my nose doesn’t go up here, doesn’t go over here, it’s here. So, you see the difference and that’s how you know that the teacher is getting across and they understanding. You let them leave it like that because eventually they’ll see it theirselves and the progression will show when they actually make the face and the two eyes is here, the nose is here, and the mouth is here. But it’s gonna start out with with the eye up here (laughs) and have one ear and probably no hair. But that’s how you see the progression and you see the teacher is getting across and they’re learning.

Ultimately, Joy finalizes her depiction of a quality teacher by providing examples for comparison from her own classroom as she weaves in and out of being a casual observer of a hypothetical other and an active participant in her own prolific teaching process—laughing as she recalls seeing the "one eye up there" in her many years of teaching. Also, important here is an active awareness of the child's progression as well as active restraint on the part of the teacher in cultivating the child's inquiry and understanding of where certain facial features belong. Resisting right answers, high-quality early childhood educators direct student learning toward discovery of the self.

Shopno also provided a powerful example demonstrating that the field should and could be professionalized, differentiating childcare from ECE, even in their work with very young children. At a for-profit childcare center that produces a high volume of services for children with special needs, her community-based center is funded by the Association for Children's Services (ACS), the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and NYC's DOE. When she was hired by a hiring manager (not the director) to teach in a two-year-old classroom, because she was not certified, Shopno became comfortable innovating curricula for the two-year-old classroom, even though she had never taught that age. One consultant responded:

> "You know this is the first time I saw sensory board [with] two years old doing so much nicely with your timeframe, going back switching roles, going center to center, come back, and doing that sensory. And you [are] the first person honestly… you should try … writing a book about early childhood development and program development, how to develop the program, how to develop, you know, children learning environment. You have a strong ability to understand that area…." I just gave her a hug. She say, "When I come here I get a lot of idea from you and I share different places"… And she shared with my director also, and my director also told me, she said, "We get lot of [positive] review for you."

In this excerpt, Shopno frames herself as a high-quality teacher through the framing lens of the consultant who told her she should try "writing a book." The consultant's focus is on a range of quality aspects—from providing necessary structure to help two-year-old

children engage in safe sensory play to designing challenging and high-quality sensory experiences. Furthermore, the consultant noted that Shopno had a strong theoretical knowledge "to understand that area," and finally, Shopno added that she got ideas that she shared with others. Across examples from teachers' positive encounters with observations, there is a strong sense that teaching quality relies on the nuances of what it means to educate children in early childhood settings. These are pedagogical and curricular concerns, but teachers also pointed to the need of certain dispositions that determine teacher quality as well.

Counter-Narrative #6: "Certified" Doesn't Mean "Qualified"

Confirming Joy's contention that "you can only go by what you see," many teachers shared another common counter-narrative of quality by making direct comparisons of teachers who passed tests and were certified, but not high quality, to teachers and teacher assistants who were qualified. Mercedes shared insights about a teacher assistant who could take over her own classroom after spending only a short time there: "She came in, her first year, she's ready for her own class now. Because she came in with that quality of understanding. And she was more patient with the child than I was."

The theme of patience was prevalent across interviews, which sounds clichéd, but teachers' value for patience aligns with Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol's (2018) call for intersectional justice, aligning the goals of the classroom to the needs of the child; and it aligns with the New York State Core Body of Knowledge (2012), a set of standards for professional development. What is more important here is that in defining teaching quality, teachers noted that certification without patience can lead to a harmful gap in service. According to Maria,

> Even though they're qualified because they have their master's, they're certified, but they don't have the patience or the passion to work with children. For me, that's not a great teacher because if you don't have

> patience, if you don't have passion, and you're only here for the money, then you're not being an effective teacher.

Using the linking verb "is" in the contraction "that's" to identify someone who is "not a great teacher," Maria makes it clear that effectiveness is tied to being able to work with children and have a passion for them. Strikingly, Shopno demonstrated that placing someone who is inexperienced as a lead teacher just because they have passed exams can be catastrophic—for children, families, and programs as well.

While teaching in the two-year-old classroom, Shopno was called upon to take over an emergency position in a mixed UPK/PK classroom due to the acting head teacher's harming a child. The teacher was inexperienced and had passed the certification tests and was therefore assigned to the classroom—which included eight children with IEPs; the teacher was removed for pushing a student in the classroom when the child (one of the eight) was having a tantrum: the "teacher just push the child because she was really like I can say her stress level was really high." After recounting this incident, Shopno summarized the qualities of good teaching, echoing others' refrain, "for teachers working with special needs, even general ed classrooms, we sometimes find challenging students, you need patience."

By the time the incident happened in the school's mixed-funded PK classroom, everyone knew that Shopno was an amazing teacher. When the director asked Shopno if she was interested in taking over the role, she warned her that the ACS presence would increase due to the incident. Both ACS and the DOE were reconsidering the contracts they had with the school following this event. As mentioned in Chapter IV, Shopno is very confident and unintimidated by classroom visitors. She agreed to the "challenge" to teach and accepted a specific mandate to rebuild the culture of the room: the family of the child was pleased, the school maintained all of its funding for the following year, and many three-year-old families who had been planning to attend UPK programs decided to return to her classroom instead. Whereas the counter-narratives above address the ways

in which teachers are disadvantaged in the profession, being denied opportunities to be successful in becoming certified, counter-narratives of quality such as this respond powerfully to the dominant discourse that an uncertified teacher is an unqualified teacher, and details in this counter-narrative help explain why teachers scoff at the notion that *certified* means *qualified*.

Counter-Narrative #7: Student Gains as a Measure of Teaching Quality

Many teachers suggested that teacher quality is best measured in the gains of their students, which is highly contextual. For Precious, a data-driven teacher, you need to examine not just the gains her first grade students make on pre- and post- tests each year.

> I think more so [look at] what I do in the classroom [on] a weekly. So things that I physically do in the classroom and I assess, I think it's more so than when we have to do like a test that we call NWEA, which is like a state test….a nationwide test that is covered over … all first grades within the whole state. Then looking at where they fell. So tests like that. I don't want to look at it, because I just don't like them. I think my day to day, my week-to-week testing and assessing the children and seeing them progressing from what we're learning weekly, I prefer those types of data assessments.

Though her true preference is teacher-made assessments, Precious is encouraged by her NWEA—a test mandated by her Michigan-based charter school franchise—which approximates yearly growth as measured in the fall, winter, and spring.

> We took it in the winter and I got the scores back. Then they sent me an email, was like, oh my God, Ms. D. All your kids went up 20% past their target and it was like, and I was like, for ^real? And it made me feel like, wow, I'm doing something (laughs) you know. So just seeing the growth of the students and knowing that they're not, not knowing or not moving is where I think what makes me feel like, okay. And um, I think I know what I'm doing.

While student work and standards-based assessments inform Precious in her self-assessment of her teaching quality, she also insists that her key to quality can be summarized as an ability to know her students and adapt instruction to their needs. Though she receives a scripted curriculum, she could never take it and teach it out of the

box (teachers in her school are not expected to). Her job is to adapt instruction. Nevertheless, she attends professional development where one-size-fits-all strategies are promoted. Precious explained her ability to resist and focus on her students as essential to her teaching quality:

> It's easy for someone to say, okay, well we do this with our students and um, this works, but that doesn't mean it's gonna work for me. So I might can see that you did like the best thing on earth and try to incorporate in my classroom and it just doesn't work with my children. Every student is different. So yes, your training concept [might] be that you can clap your hands and the kids stop. I can clap, clap, clap (imitates clapping) and they don't do anything! Because they're like, "What are you doing?" You know what I'm saying? So it's like at at some time I look at that, I'm like yeah, I could look at what you did and it looks great but then it's not MY kids and if I know my kids? They gonna look at you like you are crazy. And that's what I had said too one time when we was having a, a regional PD, which is professional development. I said let's do a swap.
>
> I said ALL of these teachers is coming from Michigan and all these other states come and teach in New York because New York kids are not the same! (laughs) you know? and that's my whole thing it's like you can come and say this works for the class! and this … could do it and I can sit and listen and everything looks great, but then we try to incorporate it. These kids is a whole lot different. They hear you say, "Okay, boys and girls," [and they're like] "What lady?" You know as little, as little as they are. A lot of them have teenage brothers, right? Sisters, they think they're just the same age as them. So it's, it's hard. I mean, I like to go in hear and look at different ideas and stuff, but sometimes I can't incorporate it in my classroom, because it's not the same set of children.

Using grammatical agency in statement after statement about her teaching, Precious demonstrates that support, autonomy, and collegiality are preeminent in the process of doing what is best in the education and development of students in her care. She describes an idealized system of support from administration that was often lacking in teachers' counter-narratives of how they achieve high quality teaching in their work with children. Significantly, the ability to know her students and be empowered to adapt instruction is important evidence of her teaching quality and demonstrates the school factors needed to support the cultivation of such quality. Thus, this counter-narrative

builds on the previous counter-narrative that "*certified* does not mean *qualified*" by rejecting the dominant narrative that students are failing. Moreover, it suggests a need for teacher empowerment within schools so that they can serve the best interests of the students in their schools. If teachers are assessed based on their students' growth—on some combination of standardized and local assessments—it would be clear that students are experiencing high quality "service" in their learning. However, when top down standardized assessments and professional development tout objectivity and determine certification and quality standards, intersectionally minoritized teachers cannot be competitive in obtaining certification in a reasonable amount of time. The last counter-narrative addressed in this chapter examines how teachers combine their knowledge through situated, reflective praxis and the important role that plays in evaluating ECE teaching quality.

Counter-Narrative #8: The Importance of Reflection and Critical Praxis

Initially, many of the teachers were resistant to differentiating whether or not a teacher is qualified. Even in hypothetical respects, teachers were resistant to using the language of teaching quality, which is why probes were so important. This could be resistance to the language of teaching quality; however, across data, teachers share my ambivalence in determining who should be certified, because they have relationships with and respect those they would consider not qualified. For example, Mercedes cited one teacher in her building who is not attentive and has poor classroom management, but she is a wonderful friend; thus, it was hard to make that differentiation, but when pressed, Mercedes presented a common refrain—you cannot be a qualified teacher if you are not open to continued growth: "As an educator, you should always be a student for life. Every day should be a learning experience. That can be from a student, from a parent, from a co-worker, from anybody." In addition to the examples related above and across

Chapters IV and V, out of ambivalence, teachers constructed a steady vision of to whom and how they would provide the ECE quality teacher designation.

Several of the teachers said they valued experience, but they qualified this, echoing Britzman (2003) that practice is not enough. There must be an element of applied reflective practice to the work of becoming qualified. In lamenting the egregious wrong of her predecessor—who had passed certification exams—in harming a child, Shopno recalled much of her experience and how she gradually learned to stay calm when children became disruptive. For Shopno, placing someone like her colleague, with no experience , as a head teacher, because she has passed some tests, is a recipe for disaster. Before she earned her first ECE credential as an assistant teacher, Shopno became a substitute teacher in the DOE. She noted that whenever she entered a new classroom, she paid particular attention to how the room was laid out and how the teacher organized her lessons; and she watched other education professionals in the school. In recommending how we might reform teaching quality determinations, Shopno applied her own gradual but intentional growth and development trajectory to suggesting a commonsense model for credentialing. Citing one of her assistants who is a "floater" with a bachelor's degree in an unrelated field, Shopno said, "She didn't have any early childhood [education] but she learned … she had experience, but again experience is not going to work if you [don't] apply. If you not add up good things." Generalizing from her own experience, in saying you have to "add up good things," Shopno asserted that being in a room with children is not enough. Adding up "good things" means to be active in the practice, learning as she did, from other teachers—how they organize the classroom, plan lessons, and work with children.

Joy drew on examples from the Head Start model, where parents are often hired to work as teaching assistants (TAs), some of whom are qualified except for certain credentials. They may not come in with ECE coursework or having passed certification tests, but they have been actively learning how to take on that responsibility.

> I've had a lot of TAs in my room that can run the room. You know they can basically do what I do, be a head teacher in a room, but because they don't have the schooling or whatever, they're held back, so or didn't pass some tests, they're held back, but is a lot of places that I did work at that I had TAs in my room that if I wasn't there, or even if I was there, I can come in not feeling well, and I say, "Can you run the class today? Here's the lesson." They can do it. They love it.

In sharing the teaching responsibility with her colleagues, Joy demonstrated a value for supportive mentoring that is non-hierarchical: "As I tell my people that I work with, whether it's the assistants or the TA, I say, you are learning from me how to do what I do so you can be … in my position. You know you could be a head teacher." Joy continued to construct a picture of what that growth process looks like for those who are not ready for head teacher leadership. They can gradually assume the responsibility, as described by others. Such teachers may not be ready to teach, but through the process of peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), assistants and TAs often are able to add more value as ECE educators than people with credentials based on coursework and certification tests. Below, I had asked Joy to describe for me someone who is "not quite there."

Gail: You've already talked a little bit about an unqualified teacher. What about these teachers who are in the middle? Can you tell me a little bit about what separates them from each group, like as qualified or unqualified?

Joy: Right, if they're in the middle they don't have the opportunity to be a qualified teacher, but they know a little bit more [than] the one who doesn't. They don't have the opportunity only because they don't have, like I said experience or certification. So, it kind of [stunts] them, but they the ones who are actually willing to learn and to do better or to move up….

Gail: How is being willing to learn related to being qualified or becoming qualified?

Joy: Because you're willing to have that, like you're given the opportunity to be a qualified teacher^ so you're basically willing to do whatever it takes to be in this position. Like you're willing to see how a classroom actually run and do what you have to do … for moving into that spot and being qualified. But … if you're in between? I would say they're qualified if they kind of know what they are doing and willing

> to learn. Cause that's showing their potential. And they're saying "I wanna do this!" They're not (inaudible) "Oh I'm just an extra person to help out."

In the opening example of this section, I excerpted Joy's description of someone who is qualified as a means of establishing that teachers in this study are very clear on the steps needed to fairly differentiate teaching quality in the ECE field. In this excerpt, which came just minutes after Joy's earlier description, Joy explained how a person develops quality through intentional apprenticeship. First, she notes that the atmosphere needs to be supportive and encouraging, giving herself as an example: "I say, you are learning from me how to do what I do so you can be … in my position." Then, she qualified "growth," from a perspective of opportunity. As she describes this process, the contrast is clear when the opportunity is given: either the person is "willing to do whatever it takes" to learn how the classroom operates and be qualified, or the person just wants to help out: "Oh I'm just an extra person." In her emphasis on opportunity, Joy drew attention to the lack of opportunities for some of the best potential ECE teachers to be included in the profession. There are many explanations for why some excellent teacher assistants do not get the opportunity to lead teach, but here Joy signals problems with a larger system that rewards credentials while failing to reward authentic competence—and those most likely to have potential to develop powerful teaching over time.

Overall, teachers' counter-narrative that they want to be measured based on their growth and experience offers an important rebuttal of the dominant discourse that formal education without experience and mentorship is sufficient preparation for teaching, and it rejects merit-based notions of lead teaching opportunities. In drawing attention to this argument with the example of access to becoming a lead teacher, Joy demonstrated that the ECE workforce in New York City needs much more attention—and more nuanced and expansive definitions of quality. In order to draw into relief the powerful counter-narratives teachers privileged in individual interviews, I summarize these important findings in Figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1 *Summary of Main Findings from Teachers' Individual Counter-Narratives of Teaching Quality*

- Teachers rejected the master-narrative that they were failures, drawing on their experiences to purposefully demonstrate key differences in certification and authentic teaching quality.
    - They emphasized the importance of experience and learning "patience" as important to their teaching quality.
    - They gave examples of teachers who had passed exams or had certification who caused harm to students.
    - They demonstrated how testing was incongruous with the requirements of their roles as teachers. For example, teachers excelled in math methods courses but failed to meet the composite cutoff score on the exam due to the abstract math it contained.
    - They reported and retold many experiences in which outside observers praised their teaching quality.
    - Joy provided in explicit detail a description of how she knows when a teacher is successfully differentiating a high-quality ECE from early childhood care in isolation.
    - Miesh was photographed and used in Universal Pre-Kindergarten's earliest marketing campaigns.

- Teachers rejected the master narrative of a U.S. meritocracy, criticizing state tests for teaching certification as "all about the money."
    - Destiny and Miesh had taken the same tests more than a dozen times. Mercedes asked why she had to take the "new" exams when she had passed almost all of the old exams.

    - Destiny, Shopno, and Mercedes had difficulty with their graduate programs as a result of not completing some testing requirements, keeping them tethered to their schools for protracted periods of time.
    - Joy and Precious pointed out the lack of preparation material and clarity and what was expected on exams, which they believed caused their failure, forcing multiple retakes of some exams.
    - Precious emphasized how she and other teachers were failing by only a few points each time.

- Unveiling many of their experiences as intersectionally minoritized women, teachers recounted several additional individual and collective psychological and material harms caused by teacher certification testing.

- Teachers provided a clear path for abolitionist (Love, 2019) change moving forward, providing a powerful call to action and justice and recommending numerous common-sense alternatives to existing teacher certification policies.
    - While teachers had different experiences of certification requirements and tests, they all agreed that some form of observation of their teaching practices would be the fairest way to measure if they should be certified.

  Both Maria and Shopno suggested for a "middle version" of certification that could serve as a pathway to full certification over time.
    - Faye suggested that certification should be made part of the teacher preparation program as was the case for her initial year-long paid residency certification in Jamaica.
    - Recommending teachers have more local input on how they are evaluated, Precious introduced the need for more administrative support to realize greater teaching quality across contexts.

- In individual interviews, teachers somewhat rejected the centrality of race and racism in their experiences and avoided naming as racist official teaching quality standards and systems of certification.
    - Teachers provided some non-verbal cues that they had a sense of the ordinary effects of racism, this did not bear out in the individual interview data. For example, Precious described not passing exams as a "noose around her neck" but denied that the tests were racist.

A Call for Intersectional Justice for ECE Teachers of Color

Just as we saw in the counter-narrative of Barbie, a 35-year veteran of teaching Head Start, in Chapter IV, a clear sign of quality is in a person's ongoing willingness to grow. It sounds clichéd, because it is an education truism—understood as common sense in the field and empirically verified across numerous "seminal" research (e.g., Britzman, 2003; Lave & Wenger,1991). Whereas teachers had many different ways of constructing their critiques of exams and their experiences over time, there was powerful alignment in their individual framing of teaching quality as seen in the interviews. This highlights the indignities that Teachers of Color endure when they are told they are not qualified—with examples such as those presented here, crying out otherwise. Moreover, across the data, in addition to framing the importance of continued growth and reflection to teaching quality, teachers present various discernible outcomes for quantifying a practice of continuing growth and reflection as a whole. When measured by these standards, teachers encouraged higher thresholds for quality, more time in the classroom, and more classroom experience with well-established elder teachers as being the process by which quality cannot just be "granted"; it can be *ensured* through time-tested experiential practices grounded in growth and critical praxis (Freire, 1970/1993).

Finally, as will be noted in Chapter VII's discussion, the common assertion that certification tests are understood to be a low-cost way of ensuring quality deflects from the many opportunities we have to credential and professionalize the workforce without tests. These teachers reject that notion, going even farther to suggest that the state's imprimatur based on testing represents teacher certification policy malpractice in that it harms some excellent teachers and sometimes enables terrible ones. Furthermore, as demonstrated by the teachers from whose experiences we herein learn, teachers are inundated with observations; therefore, we know it is not necessarily a matter of cost but of coordination and ensuring that consultants and other outsiders know how to recognize and evaluate intersectionally just (Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018) teaching quality. In Chapter VI, I will continue to explore these themes in the data as I examine how teacher certification and quality and the problem of certification testing were uniquely co-constructed in the focus group and dyad.

Conclusion

Here, I have explored how teachers constructed their teaching quality in individual interviews with me. This represents only a fraction of the many counter-narratives of quality teachers shared across interviews. I have sought across these counter-narratives to demonstrate a range of teachers' experiences and give glimpses of their quality, even though the descriptions are unavoidably flat in places. Finally, in Chapter VI, I show how teachers' counter-narratives of teaching quality and certification shifted in the focus group and dyad. In it, I will continue to draw on teacher's counter-narrative that *certified* does not mean *qualified* and draw attention to how teachers constructed counter-narratives uniquely in the focus group and dyad affinity spaces.

Chapter VI

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

In Chapter IV, I analyzed what was most pertinent in teachers' counter-/narratives as depicted in the individual interviews and most relevant to this dissertation study. In Chapter V, I presented overlapping themes across teachers' individual counter-narratives, including teachers' rebuttal of the notion that having certification means someone is qualified to be a lead teacher. Across individual interviews, teachers took up this counter-narrative in multiple ways: the tests are not a valid measure of quality, some certified teachers are not qualified, and the teachers in the study are/were qualified but uncertified. In this chapter, I demonstrate how teachers' collective counter-narratives tended to be more critical than in individual interviews and thus deepen my analysis overall. Rather than repeating themes from Chapters IV and V, I purposefully selected for analysis here shared emotional hot points (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2009) from the participatory focus group and dyad, based on the volume of speech, prevalence of cross talk, and visible cues of co-participation in teachers' counter-narration.

Due to the timing of the primary focus group in mid-July, three teachers in the study could not attend. I scheduled a make-up session for Destiny and Mercedes, but Shopno was not able to attend either session. Thus, Destiny and Mercedes met as a dyad the Thursday before the focus group meeting, and Shopno concluded her participation in Interview III.

Iterations of Analysis for Focus Group and Dyad

In this chapter, I analyze prominent examples of how teachers co-constructed counter-narratives of their teaching quality and the problem of certification. Through iterations of analysis, it has become clear that the ways teachers co-constructed counter-narratives in the focus group differed in important ways from their constructions in individual interviews. Consistent the research on racial affinity (Varghese et al., 2019) and informal (Madriz, 1997; Souto-Manning et al., 2021) or kitchen-table conversations (Lyiscott et al., 2021), because they had one another as conversation partners, teachers co-constructed a complex, often highly tellable, embedded counter-narrative that was situated in their shared moral critique of New York State teacher quality and certification.

I narrowed my focus to emotional hot points based on certain dimensions (Ochs & Capps, 2001) of teachers' counter-narratives. Here, I analyzed whether and how conversational narratives and counter-narratives in the focus group (1) had one or multiple active "co-tellers"; (2) were "tellable," meaning the extent to which they followed a recognizable and rhetorically successful plot; and (3) were embedded, depending on "surrounding discourse and social activity" (p. 36), or detached. As in prior chapters, I continued to examine moral stance, though my focus in this chapter is on these narrative dimensions as they were highly visible in the group setting.

The primary video-recorded focus group included Faye, Precious, Cee, Miesh, Joy, Maria, and Barbie. I transcribed and analyzed video-and audio-recorded snippets according to the transcription methods as discussed in Chapter III, selecting and annotating with a brief summary frames that cue to important moments, including non-verbal participation in the focus group setting. For example, in Figure 6.1, Joy pointed to Barbie as she discussed tactics she used to introduce more rigor into her PK curriculum. In her pointing, Joy participates in non-verbal co-telling, indicating that Barbie is saying something true, important, and relatable to Joy's own experiences.

Figure 6.1. *"You're Right."*

In addition to carefully analyzing the focal clips I used in video recall sessions with teachers, following my analysis of individual interviews presented in Chapters IV and V, I conducted an additional layer of analysis, returning to the transcripts and videos to further trace how teachers co-constructed racism in the focus group and to examine specifically if and, if so, how teachers unveiled racism as endemic in this setting.

I also compared teachers' constructions of teaching quality and certification in the focus group to the interview settings in order to account for the effect of my positionality as a White researcher in the individual interviews and to account for the value of the affinity space for teachers. Consistent with Kohli (2012) and Picower (2009), I wanted to better understand how teachers understand and/or construct racism in the racial affinity space, which was complicated by my presence in it. Whereas Picower, a White woman, interviewed White student teachers, and Kohli, a South Asian American, conducted interracial dialogue in carefully constructed focus groups comprised of Black, South Asian, and Latinx students, the focus group for this research study was made up of

Women of Color who all identify as Black, Jamaican, or belonging to the African and Afro-Latinx diaspora; but it was facilitated by me, a White woman.

It is within this situated context that I explored how teachers' constructions of quality and certification overlapped with and differed from the tenets of CRT. Understanding that normative discourses hide racism and perpetuate whiteness, I interpreted teachers' verbal and non-verbal co-participation in the focus group and dyad in contrast to their responses in individual interviews with me. The resulting data and analysis presented here thus demonstrate, not only what teachers deemed critical, as signaled in collective emotional hot points, but also how teachers collectively represented and co-constructed narratives of structural racism. In particular, I examine how teachers employ collectivism and self- and other- positioning to defend against it.

In the case of this focus group, though participants did not know one another, they had shared experiences, lending currency to their resonating with one another as a collective. These shared experiences served much the same purpose that a generative theme would serve in Freirean culture circles (Freire, 1970/1993; Souto-Manning, 2010). Thus, teachers' co-narrated experiences represent how teachers incrementally opened up, becoming critical and supportive conversation partners over the course of the focus group. Below, I begin with the most salient emotional hot point in the focus group, the recurring but now contextualized "*Certified* does not mean *qualified*."

Certified Does Not Mean *Qualified,* Redux

Analyzing ECE teachers' experiences with the edTPA, Souto-Manning (2019) asserts,

> According to the rules (read: New York State Education Department licensure requirements that mandate edTPA), Yolanda is not good enough to be certified as a teacher—or at least she was not proven to be. Yet, according to the families she serves, she is. (p. 18)

Without question, across many themes explored in this dissertation study as well as data not re-presented here but analyzed, teachers were qualified, not only in their self-assessment but also based on the assessments by their principals, directors, instructional coordinators, students, and the families they served. Yet the state certification exams, which go well beyond the edTPA, prevented them from obtaining official status as certified teachers—barring them from the right to enjoy (Harris, 1993; Mensah & Jackson, 2018) certification. In Chapter V, I explored the theme that ran across teachers' narratives that "*certified* does not mean *qualified*," showing the harmful effects when testing determines who ECE lead teachers are. In the focus group, teachers deepened this theme, co-constructing counter-narratives that transcend simple binaries that typically determine teaching quality. Below, I draw attention to both the content of this highly complex counter-narrative and how they constructed it together in the focus group affinity space.

Maria is Not Alright

Maria is a tour de force, strong and able to withstand unjust pressure for long periods of time, as was demonstrated in examples from her individual theme; in the focus group, she allowed herself to display a fuller range of her frustration, anger, and cynicism related to the systemic racism she has encountered across her schooling, and now, her experiences as a teacher and a mother. Maria invested a lot of physical and emotional energy to participate in this dissertation study, especially at the end of a difficult year while pregnant. She made it clear that she wanted to share her experience in the hope that her experiences could later inform policy.

In Chapter IV, I described some of Maria's encounters with white supremacy as a bilingual elementary student being placed in a monolingual class and in her advising as an undergraduate student at Bronx U. I also mentioned but did not go into detail about Maria's recent experiences co-teaching with a White Teach for America (TFA) teacher.

Despite being technically a peer to Maria, "she was on a study plan," being much less experienced than Maria, and an outsider to the Bronx community Maria is from; in Interview III, Maria explained this teacher's perspective: "Your main goal when you don't have experience is 'I'm the head teacher,' so basically everybody got to follow what I'm following." Following this head teacher, Maria as the special education co-teacher did not agree. She is studying the same curriculum this teacher is studying in her master's program at Grace College, but she has learned from experience that following a curriculum without adjusting it to fit the needs of students, especially students such as the ones she serves, is a mistake. Maria was forced into a position of repairing mistakes caused, not just by the novice teacher's stance, but also by the positive behavior reinforcement peddled by her teacher education program and classroom evaluators. Similar to Shopno's counter-narrative in Chapter V, this eventually led to active harm (Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2020; Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018) and created danger to Maria, her unborn child, and their students. Maria described this in detail in the focus group, first providing important context that made the counter-narrative highly tellable.

> Oh my co teacher says, because, you know, this is the way she wants it and this is the way that actually the supervisors want it from her department. I'm coming in. I'm basically in the building that I work in we're in HER building, basically. So it's to collaborate. It's a collaboration. My department sends in the teacher... So I'm in their home (affirmative crosstalk). She tells me, "No, they told ME he cannot follow the schedule. Let's make his own schedule where early in the morning he choose what activity he has to do."

At first Maria resisted. She said, "And I'm like, 'And what happens to Carter, John, and all of them that wanna do [whatever they want to do to]?'" Exasperated from arguing with her co-teacher, Maria decided, "Alright, I'm gonna sit back girl and enjoy the ride." Continuing, she presented what seemed to be a recurring narrative:

> Little Johnny running out of the classroom. He ain't my kid. I'm special ed. He's early childhood. You run after him. Guess what? I am

> three months pregnant. Little Johnny flings the chair at the teacher, because he was forced to sit in the carpet. Here, I have to go and do "Handle with Care" with this child, because I'm trained. You're not. But yet, I can do "Handle with Care" to (whispering) save your ass, but you cannot listen to me to save everybody. Everybody. Fine. That day, I was like, "Let me tell you something. From this day forward we doing things my way."

Understandably, Maria here positioned herself as a moral hero, and many teachers engaged in excited co-telling, repeating and saying phrases along with Maria, because they saw themselves vicariously and experientially in her shoes. When Maria took a stand against her White, less qualified, Transitional B certified TFA co-teacher, she went beyond calling out the harmful teaching philosophies that are informing her novice practice. She took risks for what she saw as right for the children in the room: "If they don't like the way I do it, she can speak to my supervisor. They can fire me. As simple as that."

Maria continued to analyze the implications of not interrupting this teacher's harmful practices. Not only would she pose a threat to teachers and students in the class if these practices continued, but Johnny will be behind when he arrives to kindergarten: "When he goes to kindergarten next year, is he going to be allowed to do whatever he wants? So, guess what? He's going to start from square one." As she fills in some of her interpretation, other teachers continue to engage in affirmative crosstalk, saying things such as "That's what it is," encouraging Maria to continue. Though this appeared to be the climax of the story, Maria delivered an important resolution in which she is triumphant over her co-teacher's supervisor.

Three weeks after Maria had taken over leadership of the classroom, a supervisor came in while Maria was working with Johnny after he had demonstrated unwanted behavior. The child had tried to start a conversation with Maria in order to deflect from this behavior, but Maria was "ignoring [him]. Supervisor comes in (in a mocking critical voice), 'Why you have that straight face? Put a smile on your face.'"

> I look at her like (rests her pointer finger and thumb on her face, framing it and looks straight ahead, pausing)…. She goes to [take the child] on a walk and walk him out of the classroom. She comes back and say, "You do that again and you'll [not] be teaching here."

The supervisor did not understand why Maria had had a straight face, so she insisted, "Oh but you need to have a smile," and Maria concluded as the group began enthusiastic agreement, "If I smile at this kid, (mockingly laughing in a high-pitched voice) 'Don't do that, Johnny,' Johnny's not gonna stop. He gonna think I'm playing!"

Throughout this highly embedded but highly tellable counter-narrative, Maria demonstrated the many examples of her superior quality and pedagogy, compared to the official classroom head teacher and her supervisor. Whereas other counter-narratives before this point in the focus group appeared to be discrete, this counter-narrative brought together the cumulative effects and frustrations teachers have experienced, both in recognizing their quality as uncertified teachers and the irony that so many less qualified but certified teachers, such as Maria's co-teacher, are considered to be qualified. Moreover, Maria, as a master's student herself, rejects the privileged assumptions of how to teach children in her school. In this framing, her experience gives Maria the moral authority to push back against harmful approaches to teaching that are delivered outside the context of specific schools and specific groups of children. Furthermore, Maria highlighted many of the ways her co-teacher reproduced white supremacy in her lack of collaboration, sense of entitlement, and eventual yielding of the class to Maria's leadership, once things became too difficult to manage.

Across her experiences as a primary-grade student, college student, and teacher, Maria had faced white supremacy, but she has fought to build a life for herself and her family modeled on her mother's advocacy and tenacity. Encountering systemic racism in the form of teaching incompetence at her son's charter school, however, appears to be a breaking point for Maria. She expressed exasperation due to her son's teacher's inexperience and her labeling him as a troublemaker: "I get a call at least once a week.

'Your son finishes his work. But he can't stay still.'" Even worse than the teacher's failure to recognize that her son is bored in class, "when it comes to math, reading (snaps fingers) he's like this (snaps fingers). He's like this. He's a sponge. So, you give him work, he'll finish. So, if he's finished, give him something else!" Worse is the fact the teacher does not understand the Common Core Math that she is teaching well enough to explain it to Maria.

In individual interviews, Maria described herself as a "math genius," and she is someone who can pick up on math quickly. Nevertheless, as her son lost points on math tests for not showing his work, and Maria pressed the teacher to better understand new required methods in order to help him, a familiar pattern emerged. Maria must engage in outsized advocacy in order to obtain basic education support—now for her son.

Maria: He would get in trouble… her issue was that he will finish and he will talk. And I'm like but why you talking? "Because she doesn't know what she's doing, so I'm helping her."

Joy: Give him a job (crosstalk)

Maria: When he failed his first math test^ my son was devastated because he's like, "I failed this test and I have all the answers right."

Precious: Because a talking.

Maria: No, he failed the test because he didn't follow the steps that the teacher wanted him to follow, and he did it differently. So, I went to the teacher, and I'm like, "OK, so how he failed, what steps was he supposed to take?" Because I like to know how he's learning so that I can teach it. At that moment, that was when the Common Core changed. The Common Core came in, so I didn't know how she was teaching at that grade level.

Even before developing the narrative of what happened, Maria demonstrates how she had been socialized to justify basic expectations. Above she justifies why she asked the teacher the steps her son needed to take to pass math tests in her class, "Because I like to know how he's learning so I can teach it." She takes responsibility, "I didn't know how she was teaching it at that grade level," and she approached her son's new math

requirements for Common Core as a learner. Instead of showing Maria what she needed to know in order to help her son, the teacher suggested that Maria use YouTube to learn about the new math.

In the exchange below, the focus group had difficulty understanding Maria, not because she was unclear in her pronunciation, but because it was initially incomprehensible to us that this would be a teacher's suggestion.

Maria: You know what the teacher told me? "YouTube it." (scoffs).

Precious: She said what?

Maria: "YouTube it." She didn't know, though, what my background is.

Gail: She said what?

Maria: She said, "YOUTUBE it!!"

Gail: You do it?

Maria: No, YouTube

Cee: bit

Maria: Like to go,

Precious: Oh, YOOOtube it

All: Oh (laughter, crosstalk).

Maria: So, she said, YouTube, so go on Youtube write the (INDS) and they'll teach you how to do it. And I'm like, "So why don't you teach me?" She's like, "Oh, because I follow the book."

Miesh: Because she don't know how to do it.

Maria: So yeah! But she didn't know.

Precious: Just reading from the paper.

Maria: She didn't know what my background was. I said, "OK, can you bring in the principal in here?" I show the principal the exam. I said "I asked for guidance or to teach me how to show, give me a website, something I can go to to learn how to do it with my child or to show me one problem and the steps, and

> I'll move on from there. I'm an adult. *SHE* suggested I go on YouTube and I get answers from there, because she doesn't even know how to explain it to me. So, now, what are we going to do about this exam, and what are we going to do about this teacher?"

Positioning this teacher as lacking agency, because she did not know Maria was a teacher, Maria revealed how families in communities of Color are often positioned as easily pacified and undeserving of teachers' time and attention. If the teacher had known Maria's background, she would have been better prepared for her meeting with Maria, but because she did not know that Maria was a teacher, she was unprepared and suggested that Maria use YouTube to learn how to teach her son. Maria criticized this recommendation, because it revealed the teachers' lack of skill and demonstrated her failure to take responsibility for the learning of Maria's son and his classmates. Unlike Faye who learned in teacher training in Jamaica—"If the student fails, I fail."—and other teachers in the focus group, this teacher was detached from the success and failure of Maria's son and could not even explain in her own words how to do Common Core math. Noticeably, despite her intrepid agency and advocacy, Maria positioned herself as not having agency in this counter-narrative, highlighting her exasperation when revoicing the conversation with the principal: "I asked for guidance … *SHE* suggested I go on YouTube."

The difficulty the focus group had following Maria's narrative rested in our lack of familiarity with a detached teaching ethos. In fact, embedded in the larger narrative and collective emotional hot point of this focus group was the understanding of the opposite ethos in their own experience—these are "Our children," as will be discussed below. This example from Maria's many encounters with white supremacy is important to emphasize because of her experiences of racialized harm as a child, a college student, a teacher, and a parent, and because it demonstrates the highly contextualized understanding that teachers evolved in the focus group related to the theme that being certified does not mean that someone is qualified. Moreover, in individual interviews,

Maria pointed out that when she tutored and taught in a predominantly white school in Manhattan, expectations were always much higher. Therefore, this embedded narrative of incompetence in her own community of Color reflected her growing tacit recognition that racism is endemic. I will continue to develop this idea in the remainder of this chapter.

Teachers' Co-Construction of the "*Certified* Does Not Mean *Qualified*" Narrative

During the focus group, there were several moments of shared experience and co-participation, such as Maria's description of her co-teacher above. Building more complexities to the frame "*certified* does not mean *qualified*" and adding new evidence that teaching quality as measured by certification and charter school lead teaching does not mean that a person is qualified to teach, teachers co-constructed a counter-narrative that had a net effect more powerful than the sum of its parts. A moment of shared experience, for purposes of this description and analysis, is a moment when several of the teachers collectively laughed or sighed or responded enthusiastically to their colleagues' words. Above, this often included affirmative or echoing responses. According to Ochs and Capps's (2001) description of tellability:

> A highly tellable narrative of personal experience relates events of great interest or import to interlocutors. The events may be unknown to interlocutors. Or an unknown or known event may have bearing on their future lives, lending great value to the narrative account. In addition, a narrator may use rhetorical skills to transform even a seemingly prosaic incident into a highly tellable account. (p. 34)

Building on their collective moral stance that *certified* does not mean *qualified,* teachers continued to evolve this narrative in the focus group setting. Compared to the highly tellable less complicated narratives that teachers presented in individual interviews, in this context, teachers did new discursive work to collectively shape the problem of teacher certification and so-called standards for teaching quality with deepening complexity, moving one another toward collective healing and transformation.

Using high expectations to prepare children for the real world. In the above example, Maria openly rejected being overly positive because Johnny's "gonna think I'm playing!" Warding off the harm this would perpetuate, Maria is willing to risk her job to hold Johnny to higher standards than her co-teacher and her co-teacher's supervisors. In a range of circumstances, other teachers reported being similarly positioned to choose between top-down expectations and what they believe to be the necessary expectations for students. Often because established academic and behavioral expectations for children were so low in their various contexts, teachers in this study had to clandestinely implement higher expectations for their children. In Chapter IV, I demonstrated how Faye utilized the non-DOE time from 3:00 to 3:30 pm each day to teach her children from a gifted and talented book that was technically off-limits. In another prominent instance, Barbie explained how she was able to "get away with*"* giving her students books, opposing the Building Blocks (2013) curriculum, which launched teachers into discussions about differentiating expectations to ensure children are learning.

Similar to Maria's counter-narrative, several teachers affirmed their agreement with Barbie and added their own examples of how they managed to deviate from the curriculum. Like Maria, several of the other teachers had experienced top-down standards that failed to align with the actual needs of students, including high expectations to prepare them for the "real world" in their classroom. Given their growing sense of a shared experience, teachers began to engage in so much crosstalk that they could not all hear one another, and I could not hear or transcribe their words. Bearing in mind the purpose of the meeting and the importance that everyone shared and was heard, I took one of my two cameras and one of my two audio recorders and invited Cee, Barbie, and Faye into an adjacent conference room for a 30-minute breakout discussion.

My decision for this selection was somewhat intuitive. Cee, Barbie, and Faye were the eldest teachers in the group, and at the time, they had become visibly detached from the conversation as the younger teachers had begun to dominate it—leaving little to

no room for the elders to participate and risking that the intensity of the conversation that younger teachers were having would diminish if they realized they had excluded others. Moreover, breaking the group in this way afforded teachers the opportunity to follow the narratives that they were most interested in, which had fallen along generational lines, and the two narrative lines were not convergent. This decision allowed me to privilege both narratives and keep the teachers' own interests centered as they continued the conversation. When Cee, Barbie, and Faye returned the room, the conversation and narratives realigned, confirming that the decision to break them into two groups for a period enhanced the conversation and teachers' experiences overall, rather than detracting from them.

In Maria's narrative, her direct communication style pertaining to anticipated actions and behaviors while also holding Johnny to high expectations allowed her to establish a safe environment, even though her actions were criticized by outside evaluators. This pattern of teachers' pushing against mandated norms in order to ensure that students are held to higher standards emerged with firm agreement and eventual crescendos among teachers in too many instances to restate here. Prominently, in the excerpt below, teachers imitate their evaluators to highlight the absurd, structurally racist expectations that teachers exclusively use positive reinforcement to manage student behavior.

Faye: I just think that we get away from telling the children what the outside world is:::

Miesh: YES: Reality

Faye: Reality

Faye: (whispering in a mock voice, presumably imitating a White evaluator) "O::h walking feet please." "You mustn't use, 'Don't.' You mustn't use 'No.' Everything must be positive—"

[Miesh and Joy say "yes" enthusiastically while Barbie nods her head. Precious plays with a wrapper. Maria looks on. Cee is watching]

Faye: That is not reality [pumps a perpendicular and straight right hand into her left palm.] (cross talk). That's not the world we live in and some children cannot accept "No," because they are not taught (affirmative crosstalk) —

Maria: used to it [group laughs]

Faye: (shrugs shoulders) They're not used to it.

Well-established in the research literature, as visible in Delpit's (1995) *Other People's Children*, high expectations for children in communities of Color provide a lifeline. Whereas outsiders do not understand the strict tone caregivers use with children, caregivers use this language in order to prepare children for the "real world." Thus, indirect and/or overly positive teachers will not be taken seriously, posing both short term threats to children in the moment and longer-term vulnerabilities when the children are socialized by outsiders without awareness of lived realities in communities of Color.

Faye: And that kills me. You know.

Joy: I have something like that in my class … every time you say "No" to him he has the utmost tantrum. I was like "You can cry. You'll be alright. But you're gonna hear 'No.'" They don't want me to say it, but I still say it.

Faye: But the director or whatever is saying "You (whispering) can't say no. You have to find another word, another way" (loud crosstalk).

Joy: And then they tell you to redirect them. Ok, I'm gonna redirect BUT you still gonna [hear] "No." I'm gonna tell them NO."—

As teachers co-constructed the problem of what Miesh identified as positive reinforcement, Faye's mockery is particularly vivid. Because she is typically reserved, her imitations carry more weight and are particularly rhetorically effective and tellable.

The only teacher who was not engaged in either verbal or non-verbal participation was Precious. She later explained that she had stopped teaching UPK and moved to first grade, because she could not tolerate what she identified as "babying." All other teachers, all UPK teachers, related to the rhetoric and expectations of positive reinforcement, despite their shared appreciation for its potential harm to students. This moment is the

height of crosstalk in the focus group. It seemed that almost everyone had a relatable story to share or an experience to act out.

Cee: There are certain things you just can't—

Joy: Right, I can't—

Cee: They wanna stand on the chair. You going to say "Oh it's ok"?

Joy: I can't pacify that—

Cee: No [motions with her right hand held upward, looks at Barbie] You're gonna say "Get down." [Motions with both hands from upper to lower, as she would gesture toward a child]. "No, you cannot stand on the chair."

Joy: Some of them don't want you to—

Cee: It's not safe/

At this point in the conversation, Maria began to act out the hypothetical but familiar narrative to teachers. She gestured toward Faye (Figure 6.2) turned away from the table and gestured as though to a student, "Are you sup-posed to stand in that chair?" Faye turned to face Maria completing the dramatization, "No! 'Where do you stand?'" She made a firm "I don't know gesture," embodying sarcasm. She dropped her hands on her lap, making a "clap" in enacted resignation as she resumed speaking, "By the time you do that, the child has already thrown himself on the ground. No, you say, 'I like the way how…'" receiving boisterous laughter from the other teachers for her performance.

Figure 6.2. "*Are You Supposed to Stand in that Chair?"*

This highly tellable co-telling event served many functions in the racial affinity space. It served to relieve some of the pressure teachers experience individually in their schools to enact a clearly absurd policy of exhaustive (and exhausting) positive reinforcement. Also, as teachers began to co-construct embodied interactions of their criticisms of expectations and curricula, this served as a counter-narrative of quality. In it, the teachers demonstrated that they are qualified, because they know how to defy policies that are not in the best interests of ***their*** children.

Nuancing high expectations from fair expectations. One thing that sets teachers in this study apart from teachers who do not share their experiences is how they are able to nuance high expectations from fair expectations. Across data, several teachers did not agree with the content on the math exam. In Chapter V, I quoted Precious, one of the teachers most aligned with normative expectations: "As a PreK teacher, as a teacher that has a degree with birth to second grade, why am I doing a lot of Algebra?" Likewise, other teachers who had lifelong struggles with math did well on the applied portions of the math exam. Teachers agreed that high standards are important, but they were

unremitting in arguments that standards must be contextualized in the work. Otherwise, they become meaningless and, based on definitions established in legal jurisprudence (Wood, 2005), racially oppressive. Agreeing that standardized tests and curricula are, on the whole, bad for students, teachers deepened their criticisms of the wastefulness of some expectations.

Tests and standardized curricula detract from valid learning. In addition to establishing the importance of their situated practices, which included protectively preparing children for the real world, teachers also continued to offer more embedded context to their criticism that the tests are not a valid measure of their quality. Having established that teaching quality is defined on their terms in this space, teachers more readily defended themselves against designated identities (Roberts & Andrews, 2013) as failures related to passing state-certified exams and learning tedious overly complicated curricula. Within this context, for example, Faye declared, "I hate the exam!" while Maria added on the important qualifier: "It's not training teachers to teach!" In insisting that exams should have practical value, that is, in training teachers to teach, Maria located Mercedes's and Destiny's criticism in individual interviews that the tests were a waste of time and money. In their mind, teachers should only be engaged in extra professional labor that improves their teaching quality. Arbitrary exams do not meet that standard. Consistent with Hudson and Holmes (1994) finding, "States…continue to encourage teaching certification requirements that have nothing to do with student outcomes and serve to 'filter out'" Teachers of Color (p. 391). Thus, teachers co-constructed knowledge about what the tests do not accomplish to be valid measures of teaching quality.

Teachers also critiqued the Common Core itself, revealing a new layer of explanatory power to how racism is endemic in U.S. education. Not only are many certified teachers unqualified, but also, standardized tests and curricula overcomplicate simple math and actively encourage teachers to rely on scripted curricula, confirming the

state's preferred role for them as technicians rather than pedagogues, denying their agency and responsibility.

Miesh: But that's the point there too that brings the exams and all of that. Brings it back to us! (laughs) (crosstalk)

Pam: Exactly!

Precious: But the one thing I can say as a person that my school, we just we did a curriculum this year called phonics, which is called Reading Mastery. It's a scripted.

Maria: OK, but

Precious: So you have to literally READ out the book.

Maria: Fine, so give me the BOOK! Why tell me to YouTube? (crosstalk)

Precious: I can't, you can't. You can't give that book (laughs)

Maria: Or at least go to the book, go over a problem and show it, explain it TO ME so that I can explain it to my child, because maybe the way she—

Cee: Because she don't know how to explain it—

Joy: She just read it—

Maria: But the way—

Miesh: But Wh:::y is that curriculum that hard that she (pointing at Maria) has to learn too?

Here, teachers are divided about what should be done about scripting. Though Precious adopted a more normative discourse than most of the other teachers, in individual interviews she was clear that while she uses scripted curriculum, she knows how to go off script to benefit her students. Following the exchange with Maria above, she also explained that she requires her children to show their math work "four different ways" on tests and quizzes in order to insulate them from failure on standardized tests.

Though teachers are divided here on the particulars, they were morally aligned with each other that the tests and curriculum driven by tests are excessive, that it is not

about authentic learning, and that teachers should not be graded based on their students' scores on standardized exams. Twenty minutes prior to Maria's discussion about her experiences with her son's charter schoolteacher, several teachers critiqued the changes in the new math as overall procedural rather than producing meaningful learning.

Precious: I'm like, the math that they learning now and … how they do it now.

Miesh: But I think it's

Precious: is totally, totally different,

Miesh: I think

Precious: It's how they do it.

Faye: It's not the learning part of it, it's how they--

Miesh: But I think the testing for the KIDS--

Faye: DO it

Miesh: is also a lot.

As Faye was critiquing the procedural knowledge required for the new math, Miesh and Precious came to agreement that the testing of children is "a lot." Miesh went on to critique the use of PK-12 standardized tests in the evaluation of teachers and, based on her experience as a mother, explained that it is stressful for children as well.

Meanwhile, Maria and Joy issued a refrain that teachers are not prepared in their education to teach the new math or deal with the everyday challenges of teaching. There is meaning-making crosstalk here, as teachers co-constructed the interlacing factors impacting the stressful environment in which they and their children are subjected to testing and unnecessary distractions from powerful teaching and learning.

Precious: Oh, it is! Definitely is.

Miesh: And, I think they shouldn't base a teacher's career on her teaching of the student failing the exam.

Precious: MmmHmm. (crosstalk)

Maria: Especially if they are not taught how to teach it.—

Miesh: Of all year, you have—

Joy: You have to teach them how to teach it.

Miesh: Worked to give them, to support to get up to this test. You're giving quizzes, you're giving math tests. You're giving reading tests, you're scoring them on how much they're reading, how leveling go to. OK, this child might have came in on a wrong day today and he might not got enough sleep last night because his mother and father was fighting all night. He took a test. He failed it. So now … that whole year is based on just [that].

Precious: Well, see my school don't look at as that. (crosstalk)

Maria: Half of those, some of those teachers, some teachers don't even know how to teach.

Joy: You have to teach the teachers!

As Miesh elaborated on her daughter's stress becoming a test taker in third grade, she compared the U.S. system of testing students to other systems, ultimately stating that testing is a money-making proposition in the U.S., to which several teachers agreed as co-tellers, and Cee enthusiastically shouted, "It is!" at the conclusion of this excerpt.

> My daughter, my daughter had anxiety. I had to put her in different sports, counseling, all kinds of things with her for the first year. This is her first year of testing. She's gone to the fourth grade now, but she's similar to me. We don't like failure because we work hard to where we get so when we get there, we put all this effort in and we fail, it's like, oh my God it's the world.
>
> So I had to put her in karate to get her self-esteem back up. I had to put her in counseling. I did Mommy and me dates and all kinds of things to just get TO her, to get her self-esteem up. But that's terrible for a eight or nine year old going through that much stress! And then you have that much stress when you become an adult! (crosstalk)
>
> In other countries, they don't do that. Only the Western world puts them in testing in third grade and earlier. China and all of that, they don't put them kids in test and all that, they don't even like them READING too early, because they say your pupils is not developed all the way, you know, so it's just like it's just different. I just think the whole scenario with the testing period is just it has to be a money thing. It has to be.

In Chapter V, I addressed the shared theme from individual interviews "It's all about the money." However, it is worth stating teachers' alignment to critical race theory in this co-construction of the problem of standardized teaching and learning. Moreover, in co-constructing important counter-narratives in the focus group space, teachers added complexity and began to signal white supremacy in tying tests to the "Western world" and racial capitalism (Anderson, 2019), stating that it is a "money thing." Thus, though implied, teachers' co-construct powerful agreement that racism *is* endemic to their experiences, even though they often resist the label *racism* directly. Ultimately, the space created in this earlier exchange made it possible for Maria to elaborate on both of her experiences with a White co-teacher and her son's charter schoolteacher.

In critiquing the exams from various angles, teachers demonstrated that tests are not aligned to measure their teaching quality, that tests are a larger obsession of Western civilization, and that if tests must be given, important changes need to be made. Ultimately, they show the value of high expectations and the contradictory dulling effects of standardization (Hilliard, 2004).

Indeed, teachers are very well aware of the problems of tests and what might better serve children, families, and communities, and across this research, teachers provided many recommendations for how to determine quality based on authentic and inclusive excellence; perhaps more powerful than any technical recommendation is teachers' capacity to serve as authentic gatekeepers for teaching quality in their schools and communities.

Experienced, Community-Based Teachers as Superior Gatekeepers

When I re-analyzed data to examine how teachers' language indexed endemic racism, their embodied ways of inviting outsiders into their work while shielding students from everyday racism became clear. This is evident in the example above when teachers

co-constructed a mock performance of positive reinforcement. In that co-construction, teachers positioned consultants on the outside of their deep knowledge, experience, and superior quality. This was also expressed in how they positioned one another and me.

At one crucial moment, in responding to teachers' counter-narratives of having to sneak around to provide books and notebooks to their students, I said, "It sounds like [it's] contraband to give a kid a notebook!" and Faye laughed with her head turned to Maria, "She said that *countrified*," and it is true. In my own growing familiarity with the group dynamic and disbelief at the absurd expectations placed on teachers, I slipped into my passionate southern Appalachian accent. The group laughed while one person repeated, "she said 'countrified,'" confirming that my identity had been renegotiated and was now more resonant with how they had individually experienced and framed me. As a result, I was repositioned and granted more access, albeit as an outsider, a safe outsider—a positionality that I sought to nurture across these experiences.

Welcoming me in as an outsider with a rural rather than an urban positionality, as someone who is White, and as someone without ECE teaching experiences, teachers' counter-narratives became more relaxed and inclusive, but also less critical in this moment, as they appeared to purposefully take on more responsibility for educating me about their experiences and centered their gaze and purpose on me. Whereas before this moment, teachers were focused on one another, in this moment, they remembered that I was there, and they put forth more effort into helping me understand those things that gave me the greatest consternation. Poignantly, this also happened in an individual interview with Joy, when I reminded her that I needed more description because I do not have ECE teaching experience. These are just two examples of several of how teachers framed and utilized outside/inside identities to position one another, themselves, and me.

Within the focus group, too, teachers represented situated insider/outsider identities based on experience, teaching context, and ethnic and national identities. Often utilized to protect from harm and defend their children and families from further

stigmatization, teachers had established a lived improvisatory means of allowing safe educators into the apprenticeship of learning how to teach "these kids" and "our kids" appropriately while buffering children and families from predatory outsiders. This embodied genre of gatekeeping transcended not only narrative but explicit discourse itself. Shared tension was embedded in their narratives as teachers co-negotiated who is an insider or not through discursive invitations and exclusions, which are discernable in the data. I argue that, in their work of inclusion and exclusion, teachers move from describing their teaching quality to demonstrating it through their discursive gatekeeping from the outside in and the inside out.

From the Outside In: How Experienced Teachers Invite Others In

Noticing how teachers negotiated the insider/outsider dynamic became an emotional hot point for me as I re-analyzed the focus group data, because at once it helped me account for Cee's inside/outside identity as a new teacher but experienced Woman of Color; it explained some of Mercedes's responses in the dyad; and it helped me construct more meaning of how teachers positioned me in the focus group. Smaller gestures also further confirmed that insider/outsider negotiation is a function of teaching quality and teachers' protection of their children.

Inviting a new teacher in. Concluding her remarks and "takeaways" from the focus group, Cee highlighted her status as the least experienced teacher among all those in the focus group, despite her years of life experience and positionality as an elder within it. She began discussing her takeaway as someone appreciative of their shared wisdom:

> Well, I took a lot from meeting every one of you today. I've learned from each one of you something that I'm going to be able to use and take with me when I go back to my classroom. Like you all are, [I am] really interested in making sure that my kids are successful. Whoever comes through my door, my classroom door, I want them to learn.

Slowly, Cee introduced more clues that she sees herself as a novice, recapping specific advice she would take away. Cee had gained more confidence in how to perform for consultants and directors while not jeopardizing what she knows is best for her children.

> And I'm not going to let any administrators do but so much to put [the children] in a position where they're not going to be learning. I like the idea that a couple of you already expressed about when UPK and ACS come then you do whatever [they want to see]. (group laughs)

Next, Cee positioned herself as someone who is using her life experience to inform how she will transform new knowledge shared in the focus group in her work relationship with her center director. Pointing out the director's hypocrisy in expecting Cee to do "everything" perfectly, Cee confidently asserts that *she* "never did everything":

> But I know that at a point my director will come in and I'm sure she never did everything. But she's like holding my feet to the fire…she used to be the lead teacher in my classroom, but now she's trying to hold my feet to the fire … I could see—I don't know if you all familiar with *Teaching Strategies Gold* (loud affirmative response). That's [where] I can see, what was done previously with my kids before I got there.

In measured critique of her director, Cee used framing agency to show that the director is "holding [her] feet to the fire," despite the hypocrisy. Also, she pointed out that she has used her wit and intelligence to outsmart this director, using grammatical agency: "I can see what was done previously." Making herself the subject who sees, Cee demonstrated an emerging confidence that has been validated by her more experienced teaching peers: "So I saw that she was NOT doing [everything]."

To this Barbie, responded with an affirmative, "There you go," while others engaged in collective affirmations, such as "MmmHmm" and "Ah ha." Cee continued, as she was being welcomed further into the collective as an insider, "But, she's on my case about," with Barbie finishing Cee's sentence, "what you're doing." Cee acknowledged and continued: "Right, and I think she don't think I'm smart enough to realize that. But let her stay in the dark. She don't have to know all that I know." Cee demonstrated her agency in allowing her director to "stay in the dark" as a to reduce her director's power

over Cee. Making a choice to not tell her director everything she knows, Cee implied grammatical agency in the unvoiced, "I will," finishing with the authoritative, "Let her stay in the dark."

Cee said she has been working to improve the relationship and what she learned in the focus group will encourage her to continue. Regardless of the outcome of that relationship, she vowed, "I'm still going to take what you have expressed here and I'm going to make sure my kids get what they need. So, thank you all." In agreeing with Cee and co-telling this narrative with her, the other teachers provided the professional support that Cee needed in "questioning, problematizing, challenging and enacting change" (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 172). Signaling that she will make sure that "my kids get what they need," Cee's counter-narrative aligned with teachers in Souto-Manning's culture circle who felt pressured in administering the same curriculum as Cee, also known as The Creative Curriculum (Heroman et al., 2010), from which strictures often prove to be onerous and counter-intuitive. Cee was beginning to take initiative and question curricular assumptions about what is best for children, but the focus group strengthened her alignment with and acceptance as an insider high-quality ECE teacher, much like one teacher in Souto-Manning's (2014) study who suggested, "We can work together to choose what is important and what we are not willing to change" (p. 173).

Shifting between insider and outsider identities. There was a continuous acknowledgement of insider/outsider status across this focus group. The permeability of the status highlighted teachers' strengths in acknowledging what they did not know. Miesh presented herself as an outsider when mentioning that for a short period, as a Queens resident, she taught in Brooklyn and did not totally fit in; Faye positioned herself as an outsider when sharing that she is from Jamaica, explaining that she is not familiar with the testing system in New York and she needed others' help; and Precious presented herself as an outsider as the only primary grade teacher who is also teaching at a charter school. Teachers moved in and out of their insider and outsider positionalities with ease,

and their facility with shifting positionings served as evidence of their broader quality. Though Cee, Miesh, Precious, and Faye also hold established teacher identities and/or identities as knowledgeable Women of Color, their candid acknowledgement of the ways in which they were outsiders allowed them to gain more access and credibility in the focus group, echoing their shared value of Freire's (1998/2005) ethic of humility: "No one knows it all; no one is ignorant of everything" (p. 72).

From the Inside Out: How Teachers Protect Children and Families

The importance of teachers' flexibility both in gatekeeping and becoming insiders and outsiders themselves, even while in their own communities, cannot be overstated. What it takes to teach in multiracial settings requires the inevitability of being an outsider in service to children in your care. As Maria elegantly summarized the sentiments expressed by so many teachers across the interviews and focus group, "And even though we have our children on our own, any child that gets to our classrooms is our child." Likewise, in the excerpt above, Cee demonstrated a similar moral compass, indicating that for "whoever comes through" her door, she too wants to do whatever it takes for them to be successful. Though above I explained how teachers let outsiders in, in this section, I establish this moral ethos of moving from the inside out, representing teachers' outward protection of children and families in their care.

Teachers' protection of children in their communities aligns well with the concept of "othermothering," as illuminated by Dixson and Dingus (2008). According to the authors, "Black women have developed strategies to resist and cope with the oppressive conditions under which many African American women labor. A prime example is the tradition of othermothering" (p. 810). According to James (1993, as cited in Dixson & Dingus, 2008),

> Othermothers can be defined as those who assist blood mothers in the responsibilities of child care for short- to long-term periods, in informal or formal arrangements.... They not only serve to relieve some of the stress

> that can develop in the intimate daily relationships of mothers and daughters but they can also provide *multiple role models for children* [italics added to original quotation]. (p. 810)

Teachers fulfilled the role of othermothers across many examples provided in counter-narratives in this research study, but in the focus group, teachers indexed children from communities of Color as othermothers do, using possessive pronouns to show their role in protecting children in their care. Continuing to cite James (1993), Dixson and Dingus (2008) draw attention to this as well:

> Black women [teachers] frequently describe Black children using family language. In recounting her increasingly successful efforts to teach a boy who had given other teachers problems, my daughter's kindergarten teacher stated, "You know how it can be—the majority of children in the learning disabled classes are *our* children. I know he didn't belong there, so I volunteered to take him." (p. 811)

In the focus group, the use of family language to index children served an important function in helping teachers to position themselves as insiders and also to establish their protective role in the lives of children while participating in and co-facilitating interracial dialogue on teaching. The justification for their insubordinate acts, including higher expectations for their children, as described above, rests in this protective center. However, this role was also enacted by teacher-gatekeepers in the language they used to represent the challenges their children and families faced.

Deepening the conversation with Mercedes and Destiny. Going into this dissertation study, I had the most intimate pre-established relationships with Mercedes, Destiny, and Shopno. According to my sampling methodology, I did not personally recruit any participants but used an interest survey linked in an email to recruit volunteers. I was excited to see that these women had volunteered to participate and that their experiences meant that they met inclusion criteria for participation in the study. Since, by coincidence, Mercedes and Destiny were in a more intimate dyad focus group setting, and since I had a deeper level of trust individually with them before the study, my probes were more intensive and race critical. Mercedes and Destiny also served as foils

for each other in that Destiny, from a Caribbean immigrant family, had spent a lot of her education and childhood with African American children, and Mercedes, a Black woman from an African American family, went to high school with a large Caribbean immigrant population. I encouraged them to engage in race talk regarding the differences and similarities in their cultures. Largely, they opted not to "air dirty laundry in public" (Sue, 2015, pp. 172-173), choosing instead to use generalization to reaffirm their commitments to each other in the focus group affinity space.

Though Mercedes and Destiny changed topics in order to avoid discussing differences in their cultures and strengthen their racial affinity by focusing on their similarities rather than these differences, they did engage in race talk, informed by their mirroring positions and how I had positioned them in this interview. Mercedes—an insider to the field, the location where she teaches, and the challenges of low-income families of Color—pushed from the inside out, using protective framing strategies purposefully to help Destiny adopt greater empathy for families, and Destiny was receptive, shifting her judgmental framing of parents in the interview.

Early on, Destiny shared that at her first job, her mostly African American parents were "nasty." This was an invitation for Mercedes to reciprocate, but instead of reciprocating, Mercedes protected and defended families using reframing and modeling strategies to highlight parents' lack of agency and education as reasons for their behavior. She also recast Destiny's normative frame in terms of situated morals while using family language to describe parents from "our" communities—language inclusive of Destiny *and* the families that Mercedes serves:

> So I think sometimes with our communities, they're not as educated and they don't know how to—because I've had the same experience. What I've learned to do with my own people is get on their level. I start with them where they are, and then over time—because it's a trust issue...I think a lot of times you know how we are with each other. You understand, like "Who does she think she is? She a teacher?" So, you know, I kind of meet them where they are and then gradually

> break that. Even when they're nasty, I'm still nice. And then over a few months they kind of loosen up.

Though acknowledging Destiny's experience as valid, Mercedes argued that it was a permeable reality that could be "loosen[ed]" up.

At first, Destiny did not match Mercedes's enthusiasm, so she tried another deficit frame, adding that parents in this first job "used vouchers" and therefore did not pay for their child's care. She said they treated Destiny as a babysitter. Though Mercedes also discussed parents who treated her as a babysitter in interviews, in the dyad, she focused on redirecting the conversation. While she agreed with Destiny that some parents do not treat teachers appropriately, she said, "Sometimes you have to educate the parents that you are educated, not a babysitter."

Destiny had been persistent in her description of parents, so Mercedes shifted her strategy again, going into greater detail and signaling personal connections for Destiny.

> Like I had a parent this year, actually, her daughter. Was the most challenging student ever, and she was standoffish, the mother in the beginning, of course...Every time I come to school, you complain. And once she found out that I was from the neighborhood and she started speaking her slang, and I started speaking it back when I was so close, like she's so comfortable, she'll come in to tell me things that you shouldn't tell the teacher.
>
> But I'm not judging. And I think that's what—that's the value of it. I could relate. It makes them comfortable… She thinks … that I'm on the same level when I had to be. So, I mean, I think that's a value [in] mak[ing] them comfortable where they are. But then I think they appreciate when they find out that I'm from the same place you from—you can do it, too.

This strategy of using her insider experience as an example helped Destiny shift her own positioning. She related; people did not "understand [her] as a Caribbean," which became more difficult when she started dating her first husband, who lived in the Bronx (she was from Brooklyn) and was African American. By carefully pushing out from her own identity in a highly tellable account, Mercedes effectively met Destiny where she was and moved her away from stereotyping families with which she had worked. This deepened

their collectivism and shifted the focus group dyad in a positive direction where they continued to connect over their mutual love of multiculturalism, the differences between Brooklyn and the Bronx, and their prior experiences as young mothers.

The manifest value of positive representation. Once they had established rapport, I sought to better understand Mercedes's practice of not labeling families. I said, "I need your help…. How do I avoid deficit labels in looking at communities that face challenges?" I asked this question as a rhetorical probe and because I genuinely wanted to learn more about discussing challenges without reproducing stereotypes. Again, despite the level of intimacy I share with Mercedes, she pushed out from her own insider identity instead of letting me in to access this sensitive information in the dyad with Destiny. She reiterated that she is careful not to label them, and if she needs to vent about a problem she is having with a family, she waits until she gets home to be a "loudmouth," reinforcing her ethic not to air her grievances in or about the communities she serves.

As the conversation continued, Mercedes further established that her stance was not merely rhetorical. In her actions with families, she focuses on asking questions and seeking to understand. Often, she narrowed it down to an issue of exposure. She said that ultimately it "has nothing to do with their race and ethnicity but" is a matter of the "experiences that they have been able to have"—drawing attention to how systemic racism serves to disenfranchise parents of Color. In addressing the needs of families, Mercedes was taking a wholly interdisciplinary approach, drawing on all her knowledge and experience in order to show careful restraint and support the families she serves. She made this clear in her individual interviews as well, demonstrating that the ways she teaches is a matter of personal and professional sacrifice, coming out of the comfortable role as community-based teacher to be everything that a child or family needs.

> We have to stop saying "I'm not this and I'm not that." We are EVERYTHING. I don't want to be a babysitter, but sometimes I am. I don't want to be a psychiatrist, but sometimes I am. I don't want to be a social worker, but sometimes I am. These are all the hats that we wear. We

> are not just educators, and we have to OWN that. We have to ACCept that…I just try to remind myself even if I don't wanna be a baby-sitter sometimes, all of my education, all of that is incorporated into my education, psychology, sociology, social work, EVEN medical, it's all there. So that's who we are as educators. We are all those things…. All of that is incorporated in who we are.

Mercedes had also explained, in individual interviews, that she understands where other teachers are coming from. She even says, "I was that person." This provides important context to how she positively reframed Destiny's comments rather than reacting to them. So, not only has she developed her own skills in reaching parents by empathizing with them, but she is able to empathize with other educators who have negative feelings. Thus, using recasting strategies to empathize with others, Mercedes effects greater change.

> Because, from what I've heard, and even from MYself, I didn't go to school all these years to be a baby-sister. These parents— *this was my OWN words*— These parents just wanna drop their kids off and they don't wanna do anything and [all] they wanna do is have us here baby sitting and go back home in their bed and come in here in their pajamas, and I had to stop saying that, and I have to let the PARents know first day "I'm an educator. I'm here to help YOU. With your child. And I can't DO it if you're not here to help me."

As demonstrated here, in the individual interviews, Mercedes was more outspoken about her own trajectory of developing greater empathy for families, but measuring some of Destiny's lingering bias, she was careful in how she framed this in front of her. Still understanding how she needed to meet Destiny where she was, Mercedes seemed to purposefully calculate what would be most helpful for Destiny to hear, a tactic that she confirmed as purposeful in her video recall session following the dyad meeting.

> Mercedes: One thing that they do that hurt their children is they don't spend enough time with them. They don't take them out outside of the community, not all of them, but most of them. And they just give them these electronics and "Go over there." They don't spend that quality time with them. And that's that you can see it, they don't expose them to things outside of the community. The only thing they know the park, the courtyard, the store. We give them the free "Cool Culture Card" for the

> whole year. They can go to all, not all, but most of the museums in New York for free. They can go to the Intrepid for free. They can go…on specific days, the children's museums for free, FREE all year, for one whole year. And a lot of them don't even realize it.

Destiny: Maybe because they don't have the time.

Mercedes: Exactly. Because they're working.

Destiny: They're working. That was like my mom, like she never had the time to take us anywhere. And she was always working. So my stepfather would like take us out.

Mercedes: But you had somebody.

Destiny: I had some, yeah. It's kind of different when you don't have like.

Mercedes: No one.

Destiny's first husband and current husband are African American, and her mother immigrated to the U.S. while she was pregnant with her, so Destiny represented an in-between identity. She was raised in a strict Caribbean family, much like Faye, but grew up in the U.S., so she has assimilated and even identifies as African American—though some African Americans have challenged her on this. Nevertheless, the ease with which she reformulated her ideas in response to Mercedes's challenges speaks to Destiny's willingness to shift her own positioning as an insider and outsider in New York City. It also speaks to the power of the dyad affinity space in helping Destiny rethink past assumptions and internalized prejudices.

The focus group holds Faye accountable. Faye, on the other hand, holds onto her normative convictions from her experience growing up in a conversative family in Jamaica. As demonstrated in individual interviews, she does judge families for not working with their children, and while she is otherwise an exceptional teacher of young children, this is a limitation. In the focus group, Faye displayed her frustration with the U.S. system of schooling, but other teachers rejected her invitation to agree. Faye tested whether such a narrative would work with them. However, where teachers had been

responding with affirmative "MmmHmms" in response to her prior comparisons, focus group co-participation extinguished when she began to use normative frames to critique U.S. support for families in her school's community.

> Maybe because we are a third world country and we have to strive to get there. Nothing is handed to us. I think everything here is just given to us. So they take it for granted.
>
> Breakfast, bus pass, books, everything. We don't get that in our country. You eat breakfast at home…[Here], you have a toothbrush, you have to let them brush their teeth, and it has to be done after breakfast, after lunch, and I'm like, we're not living in the real world. What are we teaching our children? Cause, when I finish eating, I don't go brush my teeth. So what am I telling the child now? When you finish eating at lunchtime, brush your teeth. When that kid goes out there and start to give the other teacher trouble, he learns it from there: PreK, Head Start. You know, I just think, though, that we get away from telling the children what the outside world….

In this excerpt, Faye moves from a narrative of Jamaica as a country where you need to strive, elaborating that "Nothing is handed to us" and comparing this to the U.S. system where "Breakfast, bus pass, books" are given away, to realizing the narrative was not resonating. Instead of coming toward Faye, the teachers went silent, creating a barrier between themselves and her. In response, she made her narrative more relatable, using the requirement that children brush their teeth after each meal to shift to a more compelling criticism of the systems of positive reinforcement in New York City's UPK.

As a result of Faye's shift, the other teachers moved back toward her in co-narration, and this is where the conversation at the opening of this chapter initiated:

> Miesh: Yes
>
> Joy: Reality.
>
> Faye: "Oh, walking feet, please. You mustn't use 'don't.' You mustn't use 'no.'" Everything must be positive.

Across both focus groups, teachers use this embodied mode of interaction to signal to one another and me what is appropriate and inappropriate language about children and

families in their communities, demonstrating the importance of positive representation to gaining insider identities as othermothers who care for "our" children. As demonstrated above, Cee was welcomed into the group in part due to her recognition of herself as an outsider. However, teachers also powerfully kept harmful discourses at bay, ensuring that narratives about families and communities, which carry material weight, were being shaped and shared appropriately while problematic narratives were collectively revised.

The Importance of Teachers' Situated Morals in Evaluating Quality in ECE

While this study did not lend itself to a full exploration of the endemic nature of racism as explained in explicit framing by teachers, given my etic perspective as a consultant, non-ECE teacher, and a White researcher, I was uniquely positioned to examine how Women of Color ECE teachers buffer intersectional injustices against children and families in their communities (Souto-Manning, 2018). Across the interviews and focus groups, I took up an increasingly race critical discursive stance, attending to how teachers responded and opened up to one another, if not directly to me. In doing so, I realized that teachers' positioning of one another, their children and families, reveals tacit awareness that is a function of their quality. Research suggests that we cannot position a diverse workforce as a "cure all" for the problems in PK-12 education; however, my research draws attention to the cultural functions of racial and ethnic diversity in protecting children and families from endemic racism—something that was also on display in Shopno's individual counter-narratives. Teachers' race and ethnicity are not in direct correlation to their culture; however, their race and ethnicity do index cultural practices and values, and teachers deploy their cultural knowledge in service of the protection of children and families. This draws attention to how teachers' culturally situated morals predict and produce much of their teaching quality.

In prior chapters, I suggested that the ordinariness of racism may not be in teachers' awareness, but data from the focus group and dyad suggests that teachers

understand racism and its hiddenness in plain sight more than they say to me. What Teachers of Color in this study were willing to say to me is not, and does not need to be, a reflection of their ontological realities. Given this epistemological and ontological perspective, how teachers constructed the problem of quality and certification cannot be read as neutral. My situated positionality as a White woman, cultural outsider, and non-ECE teacher impacted the data in important ways. Below, I explore the role that my positionality has played in the limits and affordances of this study's design. To conclude this chapter, I address the significance of my etic positionality and the implications of my responsibility as a coconspirator (Love, 2019) to support change against the harmful effects of racism.

Positionality and Positioning of Coconspirators: What We Can Know and Do

Above, I established much of what was possible in the phases of this research study based on interviews, the focus group and dyad, and teachers' positionalities relative to mine. In conclusion, I will take a closer look at my positionality and the implications both of what I am allowed to know and the limits of my knowledge. Here, I examine the ways in which my situated and selected positionalities served both to produce and constrain positive race talk (Sue, 2015), including the protection of whiteness (Picower, 2009), especially in individual interviews and the ways in which I facilitated productive race talk in both the interviews and focus group settings. Through this analysis, I present a call to action for myself and other White allies who wish to meaningfully co-participate in the ongoing project of dismantling white supremacy without recapitulating harm.

How I Engaged in Successful and Unsuccessful Race Talk

Across the interviews, focus group, and dyad, I engaged in successful and unsuccessful interracial dialogue (Sue, 2015) with teachers in this study. How I talked in

individual interviews and the focus group ranged from being barely there in most of the focus group to having a greater presence when making transitions or wrapping up in the focus group to being a conversation partner in interviews. Some of my most successful race talk happened spontaneously, as when my Appalachian accent emerged during the focus group and Faye identified my language as "countrified." Though indirect, this served trust building, and mutual rapport made other more difficult discussions possible.

Teachers open up about race. Teachers knew that I had brought them together to discuss issues of race and racism, so it is perhaps unsurprising that several of them mentioned race and ethnicity in some way or another in their introductions during the focus group. Precious, who barely mentioned race across her interviews, positioned herself as a Woman of Color, and Maria explained that she had joined the research study because she had been having difficulty with her "White—no offense—co-teacher." She had already shared this with me, so the "no offense" was made for the sake of others—so that they would know she meant no offense to me. It is probable that teachers felt more comfortable talking about race or addressing racism in the presence of one another.

The protection of whiteness. Despite my many successes in establishing trust with teachers, I did engage in the protection of whiteness (Picower, 2009) and drew on my consultant identity more than I had planned to in the interviews. This came through most clearly in interviews with Precious and Joy, when I began to strategize with them on how to complete certain exam requirements. Shopno also raised it in one of her interviews with me: when referring to New York State's certification requirements, she said, "You guys," demonstrating that she saw me as a proxy of the state. Strikingly, at the end of my interview with Destiny and Mercedes, I had prepared to open a bottle of Moscato in celebration of both Mercedes's and Destiny's recent certifications. As much as I want to celebrate teachers' successes, as seen in my celebration with Precious when she shared news that she had passed the math exam in Chapter IV, I have learned through this research and analysis that *these* successes ought not to be celebrated. My future work

is focused on eliminating wasteful requirements rather than contributing to the myth that they represent any valid measure of someone's worth as a teacher.

Another way in which my interviewing unwittingly served to protect whiteness was in my use of Seidman's (2012) life history interviewing method. I esteem this work and see its value in this research project; however, I did not sufficiently adjust it to fit a CRT design (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). As a result, I lost opportunities to utilize subjective race critical probes that would have been appropriate to the CNA methodology. Instead, I relied on the norms aligned with whiteness, making it more difficult to challenge normative frames and identify why teachers largely resisted the label "racist" across interviews. This also impacted my individual interviewing with Faye, wherein I did not adjust my protocols to challenge her deficit narratives about families, serving to protect rather than reveal harmful representations. Moreover, because I am White, she appears to have been more comfortable and direct in her white supremacist master narratives with me than she was in the focus group setting, drawing attention to a need for me to be more quick and strategic in challenging deficit discourses moving forward.

The Importance of Racial Affinity Spaces

Establishing a space for teachers to discuss the challenges they have faced as systemic rather than individual (Ladson Billings, 2016) was a hallmark of this research study's design. However, in my design, I initially took up a technical approach to my duties as a CRT scholar. Consistent with the limitations of my White scholar identity, there are ways in which I wanted to check a box that I had addressed the fundamental need of CRT in establishing justice-oriented and collectivist aspects to the study; however, I did not understand the import of this design until I engaged in the focus group with teachers, and it has only been in iterative phases of analysis that I have come to more fully understand the importance of racial affinity spaces. Even though I recognized

the power of a racial affinity in my pilot focus group, I failed to see the transformative and specific truth-telling, activist, and restorative impacts that they afford (Acosta et al, 2019; Kohli, 2012; Kohli,2018; Mosely, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018, Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016; Varghese et al., 2019;).

Despite my ignorance and though there are instances in which I nevertheless protected whiteness, on the whole I facilitated productive race talk and made possible a space where teachers co-constructed a racial affinity space despite my presence within it. This speaks not to the power of my facilitation skills but rather the urgent demand and need for more racial affinity spaces for teachers—preferably in most cases, with a facilitator of Color. Because of the "ordinariness" of racism in the U.S.—other than Maria, teachers often did not explicitly tie their experiences to systemic racism—the focus group and dyad provided space for teachers to push back against racist systems and structures, even though they would not always name them as such.

As Miesh reported,

> It was really nice to listen to people that you know had the same struggles and ideas and complaints and that's related to my area. It was good to speak to other adults that could actually relate to what I'm talking about…. I learned that today—that it really wasn't—It's not ME…. I've got my ambition back … so I think women especially, no I'm not just saying for a gender thing, but especially women and women of all ages all races, we need to have, not just a book club or you know a baby sister's club, we need to talk about things, you know that's going on in our real lives sometimes it feels like it's a lot.

In making this statement, Miesh identified this experience as one of justice, one that attends to, according to Sen (2009), "the way people's lives go"[1] (p. x).

In the video recall session with Miesh, which happened, due to her father's death and her depression, one year and five months after the focus group, she remembered,

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[1]Ladson-Billings (2015) drew attention to Sen's work in an awards speech, "Just Justice," delivered at the American Educational Research Association.

"And when we came for the GROUP session, interview, I was like WOW there are a lot of other people out there that are like ME." Further reflecting, she said, the focus group:

> was very uplifting because I see there's other people like me and they're older, younger, you know? So, it did help and I really didn't have no one to really SPEAK to. You know cause your family they're really gonna agree with you or they are gonna NOT agree but they're just going to brush it off. You really need to speak to someone that doesn't KNOW you so they can really LISTEn because people talk and they DON'T listen so you know Yeah I needed that too.

These words connecting Miesh's experience the day of the focus group to her reflections on it echo something important from her individual theme in Chapter IV. Her family "did not understand." To them, her persistent failure was meaningless; to her, it represented that she was an imposter. Not passing certification tests was causing her unselfing (Tillman, 20014), casting doubt on her decision and ability to teach, even though she had been widely recognized as a successful teacher and was one of the original faces of UPK. Others agreed that such space was needed. Joy assented, "We need more of this."

What I Learned from My Positioning and How Teachers Positioned Me

As I recognized in iterations of data analysis, there were frustrating limits to my knowledge, particularly in this study. Initially, I experienced this as a hurdle to overcome, but with time I realized this was an important contribution needed for the service-oriented research I want to do. In my critical whiteness journal (CWJ) I reflected:

> The main thing I do not like about this research is that there are some things that I will inevitably miss. While this is true of all research, it is especially true in this study, wherein I, a White woman, sought to unveil the racialized experiences of women Teachers of Color in not being certified. Unavoidably, there are some things I cannot know and will not be made privy to. (CWJ, 5-10-2020)

How teachers granted outsiders access to narratives of children and families applied as much to me as it applied to how they positioned one another to share constructive counter-narrative about children and families.

Across the interviews, I demonstrated that teachers were often more comfortable talking about their quality than they were talking about their challenges with certification. Even Joy, who filed a report at Banner School because of racist treatment by two professors, did not want to say that her experiences of failure reflected racism. Even in the focus group, teachers avoided talking directly in terms of racialized categories, preferring pronouns to index referents to children and communities of Color instead. Accounting for this protection was best expressed in Mercedes's ethic made explicit in the dyad: she reserves labels and criticism for when she gets home and allows herself to be a "loudmouth" airing frustration.

As demonstrated above, Mercedes's explicit and the focus group participants' implied ethics of care and protection are important for everyone, but they are tantamount to the work of White scholars who seek to work with and learn from communities of Color. Without understanding the situated moral imperative of radically resisting deficit labels, choosing strengths-based narratives and pedagogies instead, it will be impossible for us to meaningfully and lastingly contribute to the anti-racist work that is needed in education.

Here, I have demonstrated the ways teachers scaffolded glimpses into their experiences so that I could see something beyond the white veil (DuBois, 1994). However, teachers were strategic in the access they granted to me, purposefully positioning me as an advocate, someone they expected would share their experiences with a wider audience. Below, I summarize findings from comparing interview data from teachers' co-constructed counter-narratives in the focus group and dyad.

Figure 6.3. *Summary of Main Findings from Teachers' Co-Constructed Counter-Narratives of Teaching Quality in the Focus Group and Dyad*

- Consistent with the research literature on participatory focus groups and racial affinity spaces, teachers' co-construction of the problem of certification was more explicit and complex in the group context than in individual interviews.

- In the focus group, teachers co-created familiar scenarios in which an outside consultant or other "outsider" failed to understand the full weight of their recommendations for the classroom.
    - In particular, teachers criticized the exclusive use of positive reinforcement in their classrooms, because it posed imminent potential harm to students when teachers are not allowed to use the word, "No." It also sets students up for harmful discipline and not being prepared for the "real world" later on.

- Teachers demonstrated humility as outsiders when were new to a context and also in educating one another. In this, they practiced Freire's ethic that "No one knows it all. No one is ignorant of everything" in their willingness to support one another and admit that they are still learning and growing too.

- The focus group provided an affinity space for teachers to identify systems and structures as racially biased, unfair, and harmful. In this, they constructed their failures in certification as systematically racist rather than individual problem. They also named the opportunity to gather and talk about life as important to their health and well-being as Women of Color teachers in their communities.

A Call for Action and Advocacy for White Coconspirators

How teachers constructed their quality and certification was contingent on the situated context and purposes of this study. Teachers in this study did not engage with me simply out of a willingness to share their experiences. Instead, they entered it as agents seeking change as evidenced across their participation; and their vulnerability with me signals that they identify me as a coconspirator (Love, 2019). According to Love (2019), an ally is temporarily working for justice, because they see personal benefit available to them that would result if change occurred, motivated by interest convergence (Bell, 1980; Guinier, 2004) and continuing to center whiteness. In contrast, a coconspirator makes race and power visible and rather than try to avoid it, leverages their knowledge of power imbalance in order to work for change. Moreover, the commitment to being a coconspirator is grounded in "collaboration, humility, and accountability" (Allies for Change, cited in Love, 2019, p. 118).

Thus, not naïve to racialized power relations teachers strategically invested in this study, because they anticipated that my whiteness would grant more power to their own voices. Love (2019) explains that whiteness is a renewable resource that coconspirators must use to protect, fight alongside, and advocate for the changes that People of Color deem important (Love, 2019; Acosta et al., 2019). As a coconspirator I seek to be answerable to teachers in this study and other Women of Color teachers, and teachers in this study expect me to remain and be answerable to them—spending my privilege on the abolition of systemically racist certification while remembering my rightful place in the conversation, to work for change that they believe is important.

This is particularly noticeable in Maria's sacrifice of participation during her pregnancy following a stressful school year as both a mother and a teacher. Moreover, to attend the focus group, Maria traveled two hours in each direction. The sacrifices she made to participate point to something larger. As the focus group data presented above begin to reveal, teachers were responding to the situated nature of my role in the study, as

a White education researcher and certification consultant—someone most of them knew through their prior affiliation with me in that role. While emphasizing and drawing attention to their quality, which is prodigious, teachers also granted me access to some of their greatest traumas associated with seeking to become certified, because they entrusted me with their counter-narratives as a coconspirator and friend to advocate for long overdue ECE teacher certification and credentialing reform; however, they have little agency in ensuring my answerability to them, and it is my responsibility as a scholar to regard their access and use it for the work of change.

Without the analysis of the focus group and dyad compared to the individual interviews it would have been impossible for me to identify the complex ways in which teachers purposefully positioned me in these respective spaces. It would also have been impossible to identify clearly the ways in which I reproduced whiteness in the individual interviews.

Conclusion

The purposeful though imperfect design of this research study has allowed me to analyze how whiteness dominates in normative frames determining teaching quality and certification standards in ECE. Contrasting teachers' narratives and counter-narratives in the individual interviews and the focus group and dyad affinity spaces, I have demonstrated that teachers almost always speak more openly about race and racism in affinity spaces than they do in spaces dominated by whiteness. Moreover, their co-constructed counter-narratives are often more critical and complex than those created in the individual interviews. This is an important finding and area for future research given that most policy conversation about certification will occur in interracial contexts that are predominated by whiteness.

The focus group also confirmed that to meet the rigorous demands of justice in CRT, I must go beyond my original intent with the participatory focus group—first recognition that such informal conversations have been a hallmark of womanist epistemologies across time (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005) and after acknowledging this, drawing on teachers' words and actions to drive my action, advocacy, and change.. The work must also be ongoing, consistent with Derrick Bell's admonition that the battle for racial justice can be measured only by the extent to which one engages in the struggle. Like Emdin's (2017) call to develop innervision in an ongoing process of becoming and Kendi's (2019) warning that one never *is* anti-racist but one *takes* anti-racist actions, the implications of this research point to an ongoing struggle to dismantle an oppressive system of certification and education. In Chapter VII, I discuss analysis findings from Chapters IV-VI and further explore the implications of this claim.

Chapter VII

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In Chapters IV and V, I introduced how teachers positioned their identities powerfully in individual interviews. In Chapter VI, I examined teachers' co-construction of critical race narrative analyses in the focus group interview and dyad while drawing attention to what was made possible in the affinity space in comparison to the individual interviews. Chapter VI illuminated, in contrast to Chapters IV and V, that teachers have a strong embodied understanding of systemic racism but did not to speak explicitly about it in individual interviews—very likely due to what the racial affinity space afforded in comparison to individual interviews, and because I am White and do not have a shared experience of racism with them, teachers strategically emphasized their quality to me.

In this final chapter, I center how teachers' counter-narratives and constructions of teacher certification and teaching quality reveal the way forward in terms of future policy, practice, and research. In doing so, I draw attention to endemic racism and whiteness in teacher certification and measures of ECE teaching quality as made clear in this study. I also emphasize the power of CRT and CNA, when used with critical whiteness studies, to theorize existing harm and imagine future change. Importantly, I return to the research problem—that the onus for teachers' success and/or "failure" has been placed on Teachers of Color rather than structures that have pushed them out since *Brown*—to discuss abolitionist (Love, 2019) implications for change moving forward.

Research questions and sub-questions that have guided this study have focused on teachers' negotiations of their own views of teaching quality in light of top-down increasingly harsh standards for ECE certification and quality and how teachers co-constructed knowledge about the problem of teacher certification tests and teacher failure on exams. My primary research questions included: "How do intersectionally minoritized teachers who have experienced licensure test failure in New York State (NYS) define professional achievement in early childhood education?" and "How do intersectionally minoritized early childhood teachers who have experienced licensure test failure in NYS construct and/or co-construct knowledge about the problem of teacher licensure test failure?" Sub-questions that followed from the main questions included:

1. How do these teachers negotiate official definitions of "qualified teacher" under Article 47 of the New York City Health Code and NYS's UPK legislation with their own understandings of what makes them qualified?
2. How do these teachers respond to claims that they are not qualified because of licensure test failure?
3. What do these teachers see and experience as the local consequences of teacher licensure and testing policies in NYS?
4. What solutions do these teachers collectively identify as important to solving problems with teacher licensure test failure on exams?

Effective critical researchers and critical race researchers must determine whether what we think matters actually matters to participants in our studies (Souto-Manning, 2014). Thus, I used CRT with critical whiteness studies to (re)frame CNA as Critical *Race* Narrative Analysis (CRNA), which allowed me to critically analyze counter-narratives regarding issues of race, racism, and other forms of oppression on teachers' own terms. In individual interviews, I served as the conversation partner with teachers, and they served one another as primary conversation partners in the focus group

interviews—theorizing across this study their experiences and the research problem. Overwhelmingly, teachers have provided counter evidence of their quality in light of official definitions of qualified ECE teacher, even though they were not certified when this study began. Also, how they constructed the problem of certification depended on the context of the conversation, which included the racial and ethnic identities, in addition to other demographic characteristics, of their conversation partners. Analyses have been presented in Chapters IV-VI. Below, I summarize findings in relation to the research questions.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

In framing this discussion, it is imperative to understand that systemic racism does not operate in a vacuum. We must also address how whiteness and teaching quality operate vis-a-vis as social constructs that have harmful effects on intersectionally minoritized teachers and their students as well. Often, such effects are deemed the effects of racism, but as this study shows, they are just as much if not more the effects of whiteness as whiteness cloaks racism, protecting its endemic, ordinary place in society. At the same time, it is not enough to name such harms that are finally becoming more well-established in education research and theory. Deconstructing the semantic, socially constructed, and socially situated nature of whiteness and racist discourses makes possible an important unveiling of their material effects (Guinier, 2004; Kendi, 2019), but echoing other researchers drawing on CRT, I argue that the next step is to draw on teachers' complex counter-narratives and analyses to abolish existing harms and re-construct lasting change. I also present implications for the role of White coconspirators in education, research, and policy based on findings in conversation with CRT and critical whiteness studies. First, I address major themes as they aligned with the research questions from across the CRNA that I engaged in with teachers in this study.

How Dominant Narratives Shape Us: The Power of Pervasive Discourses

In seeking to understand what is critical to teachers in addressing both the CNA and CRT framing of this study, I examined the extent to which teachers' counter-narratives and analyses of teaching quality and certification aligned with CRT. In exploring across my findings, I take up my CRNA and address how CNA fostered interpretation of teachers experiences and their construction of teacher certification and quality in both interviews and the focus group and dyad. In this section, I emphasize how dominant discourses about teaching quality pervade in teachers' constructions of their lived experiences.

CNA proved to be an important tool for analyzing teachers' counter-narratives in this study. Across data and analysis, teachers presented both a rejection of dominant ideologies and a reproduction of them. For example, Shopno resisted many established narratives of monolithic identity in asserting her quality, but she also gratuitously deferred to the importance of English as the "first priority." Likewise, Barbie used the word "correct" to describe changes she made to her classroom in response to criticism from her UPK coordinator—despite her 35+ years of experience as an ECE teacher.

In particular, analysis of the tensions expressed through teachers' grammatical agency and framing agency allowed me to demonstrate the structural effects of racism in teachers' lived experiences. This was particularly important in terms of analyzing the ordinariness of racism in teachers' constructions of their experiences and counter-narratives of certification and quality relative to their experiences of material harm (Guinier, 2004), because teachers often did not name systemic racism directly in individual interviews.

ECE teacher certification requirements create cascading, mutually dependent, effects for Women of Color ECE teachers. In New York State, for example, UPK positions, requiring certification and testing for certification, have supplanted PK teaching positions in early childhood centers, displacing experienced but uncertified,

mostly Women of Color, PK teachers, with several years of experience. This reduction in the total number of Women of Color teachers in the ECE workforce alienates racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students from Women of Color teachers who often serve their interests best (Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Easton-Brooks, 2019), whether or not they are certified (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Thus, in this study, I showed how, in linking teacher certification to ECE teaching quality, policy makers exacerbate the current education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

To make matters worse, teachers face financial hardships in light of lost jobs and lost opportunities for tenure and promotion. While earning abysmally low salaries consistent with ECE center-based teaching, many ECE teachers across New York City carry significant student loan debt. For example, Destiny had $70,000 in education loan debt at the time of this study. In analyzing across her narratives, it became clear that she, like other teachers in this study, had experienced a "gap in service" (Hilliard, 2004) in her K-12 learning (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Hilliard, 2004; Mensah & Jackson, 2018), which protracted the amount of time it took for her to complete undergraduate degrees while completing remedial coursework and accruing debt after grants at her public post-secondary institution ran out. Meanwhile, as New York State certification tests loomed large in her undergraduate experience and she graduated not having passed these exams, Destiny felt pressure to commence a master's degree, accumulating even more debt burden at a private institution, in order to demonstrate continued progress and thus retain her teaching position.

Also reflecting the material consequences of whiteness discourses in ECE teacher certification and quality standards, Shopno was not paid fairly for her work as a lead PK teacher after being placed in a classroom from which another teacher with credentials, such as passing certain tests, had been removed. Despite Shopno's known and recognized quality at her community-based center and being asked to move from a two-year old classroom to lead teach PK, her salary did not change, because she did not have

certification and did not hold a master's degree. She did not hold a master's degree, because her school, Grace U, barred her continuing progress, because she had failed all her certification tests. The school's accreditation being dependent on the percentage of graduates who attain certification after graduation, Grace U does not take risks with Shopno and other students like her, leaving many of them in untenable "in between" places while they tried to pass certification tests—tests that many teachers in this study have identified as not reflective of their teaching quality.

Meanwhile, Joy, Cee, and Precious all experienced the material consequences of not being certified at their places of work in the form of job precarity. Like Shopno, Joy was teaching in a two-year-old classroom at the time of the study, because this is seen as a demotion and two-year-old teachers need fewer credentials than UPK teachers do. Consistent with the ways in which not being certified makes teachers more vulnerable to job loss, because some well-established ECE centers will not hire them without certification, Cee had been working at a poorly run center and lost her job during the study, because her center had closed. Precious, the only first grade teacher in this study, had been demoted from her fulltime teaching position to "long-term substitute," because she was not certified.

Precious's situation in particular demonstrates how often material and psychological harm overlap. The academic dean of her charter school had used Precious's uncertified status to threaten and intimidate her. After many attempts to push back against the harassment, Precious filed a complaint and the dean was eventually fired. However, because Precious was untenured and had been demoted, the outcome could have been much different than it was; because she held status at the school as a former parent who also had strong rapport with the principal, Precious leveraged her agency and power to hold this administrator accountable. Many teachers in this study and many more not represented here would be effectively powerless in the face of such harassment. In addition to losing wages—Precious had estimated that her salary dropped

by more than $1500 per month—Precious began to see the certification tests as a "noose around [her] neck" adding pressure to an already difficult timed testing situation. Evidence from interviews with Precious respond to Petchauer's (2014) call for more research at the micro-level of teachers' experience of certification and testing. Whereas Petchauer's research focuses on the testing experience itself, this study adds important context using CRT to the kinds of suffering and triggering that happen when intersectionally minoritized teachers' take exams under pressure when high stakes include employment security.

Other material harms cannot be measured in dollars and cents at all. This study provided evidence of the harm and physical threat to children and their teachers caused by discourses that lead to an overreliance on teacher certification testing in determining teacher qualifications. Both Shopno and Maria worked in schools where inexperienced White teachers were hired, because they had passed certain certification tests and as a result held provisional credentials. In fact, Shopno had been "promoted" from the two-year-old classroom to replace her colleague in a PK classroom after the colleague was dismissed for pushing a child. In accounting for the teacher's failure, Shopno explained that inexperienced teachers need to develop patience with children even as they learn to manage their own stress as well. Ultimately, the teacher had failed because she was assigned leadership in the classroom as a result of passing tests that Shopno had failed.

Maria's Bronx-based co-teacher was a Teach for America general education teacher in a classroom where Maria worked as the Special Education co-teacher. As discussed in Chapter IV, one of the general education students in the class had demonstrated challenging behaviors and resistance to the daily schedule. Following the ECE discourse of positive reinforcement promoted in the co-teacher's school of education, the co-teacher naively allowed this student to choose his own schedule. When the child eventually threw a chair and hit a teacher with it as a result of being asked to make a transition, Maria, four-months-pregnant at the time and certified in physical

restraint, restrained the child until he calmed down. In addition to the physical threat perpetrated by the guise of teaching quality through certification, this incident and others like it, perpetuate discourses of ECE children of Color as troublemakers (Shalaby, 2017). Serving as an "othermother" (Dixson & Dingus, 2008) to children in her Bronx community, Maria had resisted the positive reinforcement strategies being promoted uncritically in ECE schools of education. She mentioned that she was learning the "same stuff" as her co-teacher, but because of her experience and concern for students, she adjusted her formal teacher preparation to what worked for "her children" in this community, because she knows the long-term implications of being overly permissive.

Teachers in this study also experienced psychological harm that had material effects too. Both Miesh and Destiny were treated for depression while trying to become certified, and other teachers like Precious were confronted with overwhelming amounts of stress that were expressed in metaphors connected to slavery. Miesh had contemplated giving up the "profession that [she] love[s]," because she started believing the negative messages that were telegraphed to her after taking and failing the Math Content Specialty Test 11 times. This was in spite of the powerful positive message she had received in being "The face of UPK" for one of the original billboard campaigns advertising New York City's UPK in 2014. Such instances further confirm Souto-Manning's (2019) findings that intersectionally minoritized teachers face dire physical and mental health effects in seeking to obtain certification through high stakes certification measures.

Finally, teachers in this study navigated such psychological and material effects while facing the everyday harms resulting from their intersectionally minoritized (Souto-Manning, 2018) identities as well. In her first interview, Shopno spoke at length about how she is often positioned as "Other" and is perpetually misidentified due to her specific intersectional identities as a "Brown" Muslim woman who does not wear hijab and does not speak mainstream White English (Baker-Bell, 2020). Though Shopno resisted

microagressions and counter-narrated her quality outside of certification, she nevertheless experienced being misunderstood and unwelcomed in schools.

With the exception of Maria, in individual interviews, teachers most often mitigated their emotions by dismissing their own experiences. Here I found that teachers were quick to resist labeling harms as *racist,* unless it was overtly so, as in Joy's discrimination complaints at Banner School, because teachers aligned with normative discourses that keep racism hidden in plain sight. Typically, employing some version of a normative discourse of meritocracy, teachers oriented to a moral framing of acceptance, denying their own grammatical agency and preventing a more complex and dynamic explanation of their realities. In deepening my analysis of individual interviews compared to the focus group and dyad, it also became clear that teachers' alignment to normative discourses in individual interviews was a function of the whiteness of the interview space itself, which I dominated by my presence and questioning as a White scholar.

In contrast, teachers' critiques of certification and testing in the focus group and dyad were more active and named race and racism more overtly. This drew attention to how predominantly white spaces can foster the protection of whiteness (Picower, 2009) and normative racist discourses. Since I hold more power as a researcher and am White, I inadvertently created a space in which whiteness was protected through normative discourses in individual interviews, despite my efforts to dismantle such discursive frames. Consistent with the research literature on the importance of racial affinity spaces (Cheruvu, 2014; Kohli, 2012; Mosely, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016; Varghese et al., 2019) the focus group proved to provide an important space for teachers to more critically analyze their experiences as collective rather than individual and it revealed by comparison some of the limits of interracial dialogue. Data from focus groups also provided an important contrast to the interview space in which teachers were less critical, and certainly, less race critical.

People's Power to Re-shape Dominant Narratives: The Role of Agency in Repair

Across interviews, teachers aligned with many of the tenets of CRT, but they often rejected that race and racism was central to their experiences and that racism was endemic. In examining teachers' deep analysis of the problem of ECE teacher certification as constructed across their individual interviews, I found that the ordinariness of racism and intersectional injustice (Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018) were present throughout though often unnamed in these interviews. While teachers did not discuss the problem of systemic racism in individual interviews, they found powerful ways to co-construct their counter-narratives of teaching quality. In doing so, teachers largely rejected the master-narrative that *certified* means *qualified*.

Teachers' sense of a moral wrong with New York State's system of testing for ECE was consistent across the interviews, and this morality undergirds their very participation in the study, as discussed at the end of Chapter VI. Almost all the teachers with whom I conducted this research, either explicitly, like Shopno and Miesh, or implicitly, like Precious, who had just been demoted prior to enrolling in the study, identified reasons for their voluntary participation in it. In every case, teachers were confident of their quality, held grievances with the system of certification and testing of ECE teachers, and wanted to contribute their experiences to this research study in order to help improve the current system. The challenge they had was in naming the tests as racist in the individual interview settings, and as discussed above, this was due to the normative (read: predominantly white) setting itself.

In terms of *how* teachers constructed their counter-narratives, while they often aligned with normative discourses in individual interviews, I found that teachers pivoted to strong assertions about their teaching quality. This was documented in several teachers' counter-narratives that constructed themselves as high quality teachers and was demonstrated in a variety of ways allowing them to push back against harmful master

narratives that dismissed and invalidated their teaching quality. Initially, I took for granted that teachers wanted to emphasize their quality, but as I examined the data, it became clear that they were positioning me as a White person with power to influence policy. Instead of use the time to air their grievances about the lack of fairness on tests—which they did to an extent depending on the questions—teachers used the time to carefully narrate the many ways in which they are qualified. Teachers' powerful counter-narratives of teaching quality as presented in Chapters IV and V confirms this assertion.

As displayed in Chapters IV, V, and VI, teachers offered a variety of powerful critiques of high stakes teacher certification exams in interviews, but they were quick to bring back their analyses to their moral sense that they, as passionate and experienced Women of Color educators, are better positioned to provide higher quality ECE in their respective communities than outsiders, many who are White. Within this framing, it is important to note teachers' agency in using narratives of their quality to reject dominant ideologies about tests as objective in naming and deciding whether or not they are qualified. Teachers also drew from their agency and power to not see themselves as failures while they waited to become certified. This is particularly true in the case of Miesh who had been tempted to quit teaching but chose to be inspired by older ECE teachers who had not given up on their certification goals.

Drawing on the wisdom of racial affinity spaces (Acosta, 2019, Mosely, 2018; Varghese et al., 2019), I have realized the important role that racial affinity afforded in teachers' ability to push against harmful racist discourses in the focus group and dyad. For example, in the focus group, teachers were more open about their discipline and management skills, in contrast to the expected norms for UPK classrooms across the city, which teachers collectively deemed too "soft" to be transformative and comprehensively protective of "their children." Likewise, teachers collectively reconstrued their high academic expectations, providing insight into their moral centers in terms of expectations. Though they gave me glimpses into this in the individual interviews, it was

much more visible in the focus group, and to some extent the dyad, than individually. Finally, teachers' construction of the tests as a problem, though echoing themes in the individual interviews, were likewise more complex, as explored in Chapter VI. As teachers co-constructed the problem of teacher certification, the counter-narratives they shared became increasingly embedded in the focus group context. This embeddedness allowed for more mutual understanding and created an environment in which teachers engaged in increasingly complex dialogue where more was able to remain unsaid through their collective affinity as Women of Color ECE teachers.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Critical Race Theory

Largely, teachers in this study are morally aligned, if not explicitly, then implicitly, with three tenets of Critical Race Theory: the importance of individual experience, strategic use of interdisciplinary knowledge, and a commitment to social justice. This includes Faye, who among this group of teachers tended to align most with normative discourses related to schooling, emphasized the superior experience of her certification in Jamaica compared to her protracted experience in the U.S., she cited her interdisciplinary knowledge as informing her critiques of New York's system of certification. She also reflected a commitment to justice in advocating for her children to engage in a rigorous academic curriculum at the end of each DOE school day and through her participation in this study. Other teachers went much farther than Faye, particularly in terms of interdisciplinary knowledge—many of them, including Mercedes, highlighting powerful sociology knowledge, which they employ in their work with children and families.

Drawing on the CRNA analysis, teachers' counter-narratives of individual experience helped them to unveil, not just their specific experiences as intersectionally minoritized Women of Color teachers, but also their unique identities, positionalities, and

power they have asserted to transform their own and the lives of the children and families they serve. This is most evident in the counter-narratives of Mercedes, who, despite growing up in the South Bronx with incarcerated parents during the "crack epidemic," was quick to assert that this experience does not define her. She used framing agency saying that it was "like a bomb went off" to show how outside forces perpetrated this situation (Alexander, 2020), rather than blaming people in her community, including her parents. Mercedes also traces how she applies her robust experiences including being othermothered (Dixson & Dingus, 2008) by her grandmother and aunt, her formal education, and her own cultivated power as a Black woman to be successful as an insider in this community where she has now taught for 10 years.

Mercedes's counter-narratives purposefully reject deficit discourses of her community, and she applies this stance in her teaching practices—as demonstrated in both individual interviews and the dyad. In particular, Mercedes comes alongside parents when they are struggling, asks them how they are doing, and helps them to meet her high expectations of them in the teacher and parent relationships that she cultivates. This is also displayed in her representation of this community as seen in the dyad. As shared in the dyad, Mercedes has challenging parents, but she airs frustrations in the privacy of her home, never in public. Given their explanations of individual experiences such as this, teachers in this study overwhelming and convincingly resist claims they are not qualified as a purposeful means of rejecting the master-narrative that certification equates with teaching quality. Meanwhile, teachers also resisted the master-narrative that they are a monolith (Kendi, 2019).

Despite all of the ways teachers aligned with CRT in this study, a key point of inquiry in the CRNA focused on how they did and did not align with the centrality of race and racism in exploring the problem of certification testing and how they navigated experiences that are known to be systemically racist. Some important legal context adds weight to this aspect of analysis. In 2014, Judge Kimba Wood of the Southern District of

New York finally deliberated a court case that was approaching its third decade since beginning in the 1990s. *Gulino vs. Board of Educ.* (2015) asked whether New York State's Liberal Arts and Sciences Test (LAST) for teachers was racist or not, citing precedent involving similarly arbitrary tests for firefighters and police officers. In order for a professional test to meet the legal threshold to be deemed racist, it must both result in racially and ethnically minoritized workers' disproportionate failure and contain information that is not directly related to the job. By these legal standards, Judge Wood deemed the LAST to be racist. Despite the fact that many teachers in this study, including Destiny and Precious, had struggled to pass the LAST exam, they nevertheless did not use the word *racist* to describe this test.

Even though they all agree that the testing system is flawed, teachers expressed a combination of avoidance, ambivalence, resistance, and some disagreement in calling the tests or system of testing racist to me. This was an important conflict for purposes of this research study, because the CRNA methodology required that I examine what teachers deem to be critical rather than center my own sense of the problem. As a result of the dissonance this produced in the data, I deepened my analysis to determine if teachers believed the tests are racist and were avoiding the word due to the interview spaces' dominance of whiteness. I also examined to see if discomfort guided their hesitance to describe tests as *racist*, or if they simply did not agree with my claim that the tests were, in fact, racist.

If teachers were either avoiding or purposely not using the word *racist*, I used CRT, including an analysis of whiteness, to account for both why that might be the case and how teachers' use of discourse might have lived impacts. As a result of this deeper analysis, it became clear that teachers did not always voice the word *racist* in individual interviews as a purposeful choice, and though they did not voice agreement with the centrality of race and racism, their collective experiences as co-constructed in the focus

group interview suggested otherwise. This is an area for continued research and consideration.

For purposes of CRNA in this study, what matters to teachers in how they position me is that I advocate to policymakers a theory of high quality ECE teaching approved by teachers themselves. In contrast to being an ally, teachers call me to "work [my] privilege for [their] dark lives" (Love, 2019, p. 117).

Towards a Women of Color Theory of High Quality for ECE

Finally, this research builds on a wide body of research that is challenging standards-based definitions of teaching quality in hopes of theorizing how teachers of Color might redefine teaching quality in their own terms (Acosta et al., 2019; Love, 2019). Several teachers in this study indicated in both the focus group and individual interviews that they would like to see multiple pathways and measures of review for their certification and credentialing. Shopno in particular was in favor of multiple measures to advance her credentials professionally—without certification—as she may never pass certification tests due to how tests privilege monolingual mainstream White English (Baker-Bell, 2020; Souto-Manning, 2019). The key injustice she highlighted is having years of experience and documented teaching quality recognized by school leaders, families, and communities across Queens, and yet being unable to be paid or have a teaching contract reflective of her unique gifts, contributions, and experiences. Because classroom teacher certification drives determinations about quality, teachers like Shopno find themselves stuck in poverty level wages.

All of the teachers in this study recommended that observations be used to fill the gap in how ECE teachers become certified and/or earn additional credentials that would qualify them for higher pay and certain job protections. This option would be particularly compelling for assistant teachers as described by Joy, because it could create opportunities and open doors for them to eventually become lead teachers. Faye was one

of the most outspoken teachers regarding the pitfalls of certification in the U.S. context. Faye's sense of Jamaican superiority became central to this study as a cross theme, because many of the teachers, without having had her experience, recommended the kinds of experiences—such as year-long internships and observations that she had in Jamaica—as a way to suggest that teaching quality be determined.

To earn a teaching credential in Jamaica, teachers were given a one-year paid internship, similar to a medical residency, during which time Faye said she felt that she learned how to teach. She did not have a cooperating teacher. "It was my class. It was my responsibility. I had to do everything…. and the lecturers [would] come in to assess me." This seemingly novel recommendation would also operate in stages and attract more Teachers of Color to teacher preparation. As discussed by Madkins (2011), many People of Color do not pursue teaching, because a common feature of traditional teacher preparation—not working while student teaching—is cost prohibitive. Faye's solution addresses both the problem identified by Madkins and would have the advantage of running through traditional teacher preparation programs—as championed by Anderson (2019), Philip et al. (2018), and Zeichner (2014), to name only a few, as a means of resisting neoliberalism as it inheres in alternative teacher certification programs.

Much of teachers' resistance to normative frames of teaching quality often dovetailed in discussions with the alternatives they would suggest for measuring teaching quality. Consistent with what the literature on high stakes certification testing has already confirmed (Gitomer et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2012, Legeros, 2013; Souto-Manning, 2019), this study shows that such tests not only lack validity, but they also perpetuate harm—providing a guise of quality to some teachers without the personal dispositions, experience, and cultural relevance to make a positive impact on children's learning. Thus, teachers' resistance and activist stances help account for their motivations in participating in the study in order to offer alternative solutions for ensuring teacher quality, particularly in the context of UPK expansion in New York City and nationwide. Here, I have

reviewed some of teachers' primary recommendations for creating a more just ECE teacher certification process. In the next section, I build on teachers' recommendations, offering up implications from an abolitionist perspective.

From "Do No Harm" to Dismantling Oppressive Structures: Abolitionist Implications

This study is relevant to other scholars seeking to do research to repair white supremacist harm perpetrated in and through ECE (Souto-Manning, 2018; Souto-Manning, 2019, Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol; Dahlberg et al, 2013) and in teacher certification (Ellis & Epstein, 2015; Graham, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Lemberger & Reyes- Carrasquillo, 2011, Souto-Manning, 2019; Souto-Manning et al., 2020). For White folx, forming authentic affinity is important (Love, 2019). We must pivot/shift from centering our own interests to acknowledging the power of our unearned privilege and leveraging it for good that transcends our own well-being. In this section, I address some of the most urgent abolitionist implications of my research and findings.

Throughout this study, in drawing on Scholars of Color and their research, I have benefitted from much important scholarship and research practice regarding the importance of racial affinity spaces. This includes key studies used across this research (e.g., Cheruvu2014; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Kohli, 2012; Mensah & Jackson, 2008; Souto-Manning, 2019; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). Such studies draw heavily either on purposefully constructed racial affinity spaces, or on racial affinity between researcher and participant, and have deeply informed my sense—though crude at the design phase—of the need to create a racial affinity space, to the extent possible with me included, in this study. Further, I have been influenced by the race-based caucuses promoted by Varghese et al. (2019) and have drawn heavily on the theory and methods of

Picower (2009), Picower and Kohli (2017), and more recently, Love (2019) to make sense of my identity as a White scholar facilitating affinity spaces in this study.

It is only in making sense of the comparison between teachers' responses in individual interviews and their co-constructed counter-narratives in the focus group that I was able to appreciate—to the extent that I am able as a White researcher—the emotional labor that teachers invest in seeking the change they hope to achieve. Building on strong prior relationships with several teachers in this study, I was surprised to learn the extent to which their conversations with each other could be orders of magnitude more transformative and critical—in explicit and embodied ways—than in individual conversations with me; and, in comparison, that teachers moderated their language in talking with me individually with purposive aims.

New awarenesses that this finding has wrought have already influenced my teaching and minimized some of my most taken-for-granted assumptions that talk about racism is frank and open in settings that People of Color indicate that they consider to be "safe." That is simply not true based on findings from this study. In my teaching of White students, while bearing in mind that they are not monoliths (Jupp et al., 2015), I am careful to warn against assumptions they might also make based on what their friends, colleagues, and students of Color might say to them in talk about race, I strengthen these warnings by sharing personal experiences in race talk with my African American husband and our family, and I encourage them through examples in seeking to establish or fortify their own abolitionist stances as educators. Fortunately, findings and implications presented in this study provide more suggestions for the way forward both in terms of policy and research, with specific implications for White educators, researchers and policy makers. This is especially true and urgent in ECE research and policy contexts in which the overwhelming majority of researchers and policy makers are White women.

It is important to recognize that "safe" is not enough. White educators, researchers, and policymakers must move from being allies, mitigating harm, and seeking

to create safety in education, research, and policy making to using our privilege in seeking to radically change a system that is racist and centers whiteness. Before elaborating on this, addressing final implications for the study, I draw on the final theme above to address practical considerations that teachers deemed crucially important across interviews and the focus group.

Reasons and Opportunities to Disentangle ECE Certification and Credentialing

In both the interview and focus group, Maria noted the lack of fairness that an unskilled, unqualified White TFA teacher had been placed in her Bronx setting with a transitional B certification. This type of certification, common across many states, is intended to fill hard to staff vacancies in areas like math and science by allowing career changers time to complete their certification. Simply stated, such alarmist measures are not necessary in ECE where there is an experienced, uncertified workforce ready and motivated to fill needs associated with UPK expansion—if their teaching quality is recognized by official mandates. However, Maria was also concerned with providing a pathway to certification. Drawing into relief her own uncertified marginalized status, leaving Maria questioned, "Why can't there be a middle program [for us]?" Across the interviews, several teachers presented their own versions of the same idea. What might a "middle version" of ECE certification and credentialing look like?

Shopno got very excited in the second interview naming off the many alternatives that should be considered in determining teacher credentials, using a series of "or, or, or" at a particularly salient emotional hot point to present her recommendations. In doing so, she went so far as to suggest, consistent with data from her counter-narrative, that certification standards would be fairer if they were *more demanding*, rather than simply using tests to designate quality. Instead, teachers should go through a rigorous mentorship and gain experience as assistants prior to being given responsibility for a whole classroom—just as she had worked for years as a substitute and in various assistant roles

prior to lead teaching in ECE. Such a recommendation was bold, and yet it summarized many assertations across this research that excellent teachers have high standards, especially for children in low-income communities of Color (Delpit, 2012; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Hilliard, 2004). Also, *their* notions of quality are indeed more protective of children, families, and communities, especially the low-income communities of Color where most of the teachers in this study taught.

Higher standards that authentically assess teachers' skills with children and families would allow teachers like Shopno to gain upward mobility in the profession without passing standardized tests. If she and other ECE teachers like her who are committed to teaching in community-based settings were evaluated based on such superior standards of quality, she would have a higher official status as a teacher. On a very practical level, this would allow her to have a contract at her school, and rather than be paid low hourly wages as an entry-level worker, earn a salary. Additionally, as discussed in my analysis of teachers' co-constructions of their higher standards, teachers' own ability to train and apprentice others is underutilized, despite their great potential to promote excellence in ECE.

At the center of Shopno and Maria's arguments, supported by Joy's critiques of a lack of opportunity for teaching assistants to lead teach, is an important notion that urgently needs attention. As ECE advocates push forward the agenda for ECE professionalization on behalf of ECE teachers, we are amassing a burden of certification on the Women of Color teachers who have been the bedrock of the profession since the beginnings of Head Start (Goodwin et al., 2008). Teachers' counter-narratives demonstrate how NYC's UPK requirement that teachers be certified as K-12 classroom teachers has undermined their viability in the field. This is because teacher K-12 certification has historical roots in policies that served to push out Teachers of Color following *Brown* (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Tillman, 2004). In the meantime, policy makers use *credentialing* and *certification* interchangeably, even

though these are different—with credentialing carrying less historical baggage and showing greater potential to allow for a "middle program" that would center and support Women of Color teachers already in and entering into the profession.

Implications for Policy

When I began this dissertation study, I had planned to argue that we need to reduce the number of tests and make them more relevant, if not eliminate them altogether. If used correctly, tests can give us some information about how some PK-12 students of Color perform compared with their White peers (Ladson-Billings, 2017). However, certification testing has historical roots in the project to push teachers out of the profession following *Brown* (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). Given the lack of validity such tests have demonstrated, their predatory nature in profiteering by extraction from low-income communities of Color (Anderson, 2019) and the manufactured failure of People of Color (Love, 2019), the best course of action is to create new systems for credentialing and, if needed, certifying ECE teachers.

Of particular concern to me is how cutoff scores are determined in ways that deeply align with teachers' criticisms that the state tests were "all about the money." When the state of Massachusetts instituted harsher exams as documented by Legeros (2013), they reversed the original cut off scores to provide a safety net to some fourth-grade teachers. Analyzing data from across fourth grade math scores the following year for students of teachers who passed with the safety net and those who did not, Legeros found no significant relationship in student achievement outcomes. While it is problematic to use student test score data to account for teacher quality, studies like this add to the growing body of research rebutting the logic that teacher testing will ensure teaching quality (Gitomer et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2012; Souto-Manning, 2019).

Thus, one of the most important recommendations here, drawing on teachers' counter-narratives of quality, is to eliminate state certification tests for teachers. If tests

are absolutely essential, then radical transformation is needed to push out profiteering interests such as Pearson (2019). When New York State tasked Pearson with redesigning its teacher certification exams to mimic "bar-like" quality, numerous short-cuts to this charge were taken. Cut off scores were arbitrarily raised to statistically create a bell curve cut off (Hilliard, 2004), necessitating the creation of more drastic cut off scores than were actually needed in order to simulate the bar-like exam rigor. Due to Pearson's profit interests in teachers' failure (Love, 2019), they are not well equipped or motivated to improve their tests, and actions such as these are likely to be reproduced. Indeed, such statistically arbitrary cut off scores explain why many teachers in this study failed the same tests (barely) multiple times and Precious described her experiences as a "noose around her neck."

In fact, her and Joy's complaints that they did not know what to study for in preparing for exams was also a result of Pearson's profit motives. Given their private interests, there is a lack of adequate preparation materials and transparency regarding the tests and systems Pearson uses to create the semblance of rigor. In contrast, a public system for ensuring teaching quality might draw on the existing knowledge base of experts and ECE teachers in the state to overhaul existing systems of certification. After all, this was the existing field of experts solicited for their opinions in Judge Wood's (2015) decision that the LAST exam was racist. As demonstrated in that case and this study, experts and ECE teachers are ready and willing to contribute to public efforts to reform teaching certification across New York State.

A common critique of abolishing certification tests is that they are inexpensive (Hill et al., 2012); however, since ECE teachers are already under close surveillance—as demonstrated across interviews and teachers' improvised tableaux in the focus group—the possibility of using observations and other measures of reviewing them are not only more valid and intersectionally just (Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018), they are also more cost effective and provide ways to leverage the ECE Teacher of Color knowledge

base in the form of formal mentorships and training they could provide. Moreover, while the goals to professionalize the of field of ECE are worthy, they have also attracted an unwanted burden on Women of Color teachers. Findings from this study suggest that professionalization does not have to come with the cost of accepting greater test burdens in particular on behalf of teachers. Ultimately, whatever next actions should be taken, can only be fairly taken if and when ECE Teachers of Color are part of the conversation. ECE policy makers must center them and their recommendations in policy deliberations.

Another implication related to both policy and research addresses the unique findings that I constructed in comparing teachers' responses in the individual interviews to their responses in the focus group and dyad affinity spaces. I entered this dissertation study with many acknowledged assumptions and biases about what I thought was wrong with the system of teacher certification testing. In accessing teachers' developed narratives of their experiences with certification, I discovered their experiences had been worse and far more traumatizing than I ever imagined, and in fact, teachers disclosed many details of trauma and harm in individuals interviews with me. Yet, as a result of conducting both individual interviews, a focus group, and dyad, it became clear that teachers did not construct for me the full depth and breadth of their experiences in the predominantly white space of the interviews. The individual interview setting was predominantly white, because of the format, my power and privilege as a White researcher, and the power hierarchies at play. As a result, teachers and I both protected whiteness. As policy makers seek to create change that will benefit Teachers of Color and the cause of justice, race-based caucuses (Varghese et al., 2019) should be foundational to the design of teacher certification and credentialing policies from an abolitionist perspective moving forward.

Implications for Future Research

Though this research represents specifical instantiations of a more pervasive problem, it is nevertheless not generalizable. Another dissertation could have been written by me with other counter-narratives not included here. Certainly, another researcher, regardless of their racial identity and positionality, would have constructed different analyses of how teachers analyzed the problem of certification. While the racial and multicultural diversity of this unique group of teachers speaks to the breadth of Teachers of Color I reached and the depth of mutual trust that we cultivated together, more research needs to address how Teachers of Color can engage in policy making of ECE credentialing and certification standards. Also, more research is needed on the teachers I did not reach: the many teachers, especially Teachers of Color who fall through the cracks or leave ECE because of discouragement, low pay, and other reasons.

For those teachers who participated in this study, doing interviews was purposive in their journeys towards progress. Not only did teachers use the opportunity to be interviewed to advocate for change, they also used it to leverage strength they needed to obtain certification. Mercedes, Destiny, and Precious all became certified during the course of interviews, the focus group, and dyad. Others have continued to reach major milestones since participating in the study. Joy secured a temporary COVID emergency certification. Maria and Miesh have now graduated. Though the systems in place are riddled with racial inequities, these milestones, which were supported through the act of telling and mutually constructing counter-narratives, indicate that more research is needed to cultivate teachers' co-constructing of solutions to the problem of certification. In particular, there is a demand for research with Teachers of Color that is transformative, humanizing, and collaborative (Lyiscott et al., 2018; Paris & Winn, 2014) and naturally leads to purposive aims in their authentic professionalization. To be clear, as Freire (1998/2005) noted professionalization has its place in the growth of educators, provided that it is not tethered to so-called neoliberal progress and other hegemonic aims.

It is also important to note the dynamic potential of combining CRT with CNA. Each of the tenets from CRT as used in this study allowed me to explore how CRT powerfully aligns with CNA. They also help us focus on the various domains of teachers' experiences, helping to address the research questions. Of particular analytical use to this study was CNA's call to center what teachers deem to be critical. In seeking to understand teachers' frequent denial of the term *racist*, using CNA, I found that teachers' resistance was a call for me to focus on the problem of whiteness instead. Though *whiteness* was not a term that they would use either, this race-centered problem gained teachers' critical attention in the focus group, demonstrating their more comprehensive moral alignment with CRT, if not explicitly then implicitly. In denying the word *racist* while visibly mocking the preponderance of whiteness in ECE consultations they receive, teachers' collective counter-narratives demonstrate more than they articulate, "One cannot enter freedom-dreaming spaces holding dark people's nightmares. We cannot have a conversation about racism without talking about Whiteness" (Love, 2019, p. 119).

In centering counter-narratives of People of Color in our research, White coconspirators in education research in particular must also resist what we think we understand of agency and begin to examine agency drawing on CRNA and other related methodologies that consider the role of whiteness in our research. To that end, we must also do research in our own communities that helps us to address why White educators, researchers, and policy makers are so quick to center our own White perspectives in our research—and work through transformative research to dismantle such racist orientations (Bonilla-Silva, 2010) in our work.

In my own future research, given that the general survey was administered but not analyzed, it is important to conduct additional mixed-methods analysis that includes this data so that I can further speak to questions of policy and teachers' recommendations for changes to certification moving forward.

Finally, and offered as a possibility and consideration for methodology moving forward: attending to the failures of this study due to my White positionality further illuminates the ways in which Scholars of Color might nuance their methodology in order to illuminate their unique contributions. While I will make no direct recommendations concerning next steps for Scholars of Color, this is a possibility for future research and collaborations in racial affinity spaces or in collaborations with White coconspirators.

Limitations

This study served to reveal the intersectionally minoritized experiences of Women of Color teachers in this study, but it conceals those teachers who are perhaps most in need of change in teacher certification and credentialing, because the sampling was not designed to include them. Instead, I sought to understand the experiences of those Women of Color teachers who had achieved some successes in seeking certification but had fallen short of becoming fully certified. In doing so, I drew attention to how, despite the various advantages teachers in this study enjoyed that allowed them to participate and persist in their journeys as ECE teachers, they too articulated themes of giving up across their narratives. In bearing witness to Women of Color teachers' experiences with certification in this study, I hoped to also draw attention to the countless other uncertified ECE educators who are invisibilized in the process of gatekeeping tests, other obstacles to becoming certified, and as Joy described, opportunities for teaching assistants to even begin the process. The lack of such teachers' voices is nevertheless an important limitation of this study.

Also, participants in this sample self-selected, inhering a certain bias. As mentioned in Chapter IV, all the teachers in this study wanted to contribute their experience and extensive knowledge of teaching, and all had some grievance with the New York State certification process. They had time to open the recruitment survey,

chose to volunteer, and had the means to participate. What separates the teachers in this study from others who have left the profession is an important limitation of this research.

The sampling procedure also produced more volunteers for this study than anticipated, and as a result, teachers shared counter-narratives in greater variety than I was able to adequately present here. As a whole, though not fully representative, this study has captured a slice of the experiences of New York City Women of Color ECE teachers, particularly monolingual Black and African American teachers. It also includes three Afro-Latina teachers and one teacher from South Asia, inclusive of three multilingual teachers. As a result, I have captured some of teachers' experiences with linguistic racism, particularly from the counter-narratives of Shopno and Maria, but I failed to thoroughly address multilingual teachers' experiences with teacher certification and official labels of ECE quality. More research is certainly needed with such ECE teachers as well.

Conclusion

I entered this work, because I saw firsthand the indignities faced by ECE Teachers of Color who wanted to be certified and yet countless obstacles stacked up to disenfranchise them from professionalization. In particular, I noticed that the onus was on teachers to become certified rather than systems to change; I realized the role I play as a certification consultant making liberal (and sometimes neoliberal) tradeoffs in order to help teachers win short-term gains in their testing and certification. As I prepared to conduct this research, interviewed teachers, and engaged in analysis, I have come to see that an abolitionist perspective is needed in order to address the overwhelming shortage of Teachers of Color in the workforce, not just in ECE, but in primary and secondary grades as well. Across this study, I have presented a preponderance of evidence that goes

well beyond mere complaints that tests are unjust; instead, data and findings in this study present the need for ECE certification and credentialing policy makers to reckon with how ECE teachers are positioned as qualified or unqualified—as well as the extent to which they are excluded from contributing to policy making as well. At no other moment is this reckoning more important than it is now as our nation advances toward national UPK expansion and the broader professionalization of the ECE teaching force.

In this research study, I have added onto the body of research that presents Women of Color ECE teachers' experiences with certification testing. While most of the existing literature has reported on experiences of K-12 pre- and in-service Teachers of Color, I have engaged similarly in deeper analysis with a focus on ECE Women of Color teachers' experiences. Combining attention to micro-level experiences with high stakes certification tests (Petchaur, 2014) and counter-narratives of teaching quality and CNA analysis (Souto-Manning, 2019), drawing on teachers' language and experiences, I have confirmed the absurdity of teacher certification testing (Baker-Doyle & Petchauer, 2015). Furthermore, drawing on historical research (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Tillman, 2004) I have demonstrated the specific racist harms that such tests and certification have perpetuated. Yet, this dissertation offers only a glimpse into the disproportionate ways that tests, drawing on master-narratives of teacher quality, impact teachers who are excluded from certification and teacher certification and testing is just one example of how existing standards for teaching quality jeopardize intersectionally minorized teachers' and their students' well-being. This work is just the beginning of more research that is needed.

Drawing on CRT and critical whiteness studies, I have taken up a stance as a coconspirator (Love, 2019) with Women of Color ECE teachers in this study calling for major overhaul in how we determine teaching quality, whom we include in the changemaking process, and even—considering the limitations of individual interviews—how conversations with Teachers of Color about what they recommend are deemed to

have been successful or unsuccessful. Taken together, these findings and implications provide both a way forward for me as a scholar activist and some important directions for policy in ECE teacher certification and credentialing.

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Appendix A

USNY Notice of Uncompleted Requirements for Certification

THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

Office of Teaching Initiatives
89 Washington Avenue, Room 5N EB

Web: www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert
Contact: http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/contact.htm
Fax: (518) 473-0271

Initial Certificate Early Childhood Education (Birth-Grade 2)

04/07/2021

GAIL R BUFFALO
601 E 20TH ST.
APT MG
NEW YORK, NY 10010

Notice of Uncompleted Requirements for Certification

The documents recorded during the last three years in your TEACH account have been reviewed. The Office of Teaching Initiatives cannot approve the issuance of your Initial Certificate Early Childhood Education (Birth-Grade 2) based upon this review. Evidence to satisfy the unmet requirements listed below must include your date of birth and the last four of your Social Security Number.

- **College Coursework - Mathematical Processes - 6 S.H.**
  Upon review of your records on file, we credited **4 S.H.** towards this requirement. You are still deficient of this requirement by **2 S.H.** You need to provide further documentation to satisfy the above deficiency.

- **College Coursework at the Student Developmental Level - Early Childhood - Birth - Grade 2 - 6 S.H.**
  Upon review of your records on file, we credited **0 S.H.** towards this requirement. You are still deficient of this requirement by **6 S.H.** You need to provide further documentation to satisfy the above deficiency.

- **Content Specialty Test (CST) - Multi-Subject Or Multi-Subject: Teachers of Early Childhood (Birth-Grade 2)**

Unmet coursework

For guidance on appropriate coursework to satisfy any unmet coursework requirements listed in this letter please go to www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/faqcw , Coursework to Satisfy Unmet Requirements. PLEASE NOTE: If you are considering distance learning programs, please seek verification from the college that your course work would count toward a degree in the subject of the course.

Application Review Policy

When you send transcript(s) of any college coursework to this office, you must send sealed, official transcripts. Photocopies, faxes, grade reports and student copies are unacceptable. When you are having your transcript(s) sent to our office, please ask that each college include the following information (on, or stapled to your transcripts): your full name - exactly as it appears in your TEACH account, the last 4 digits of your SSN, and/or your date of birth so that we can add your transcript(s) to your account.

Applications are evaluated based upon the order in which they enter "ready for review" status. This is a combination of application date (the date on which you have successfully submitted and paid for your application) and the date on which your documentation (college recommendations, transcripts, workshops, letters, etc.) is processed and entered onto your account. Once your applications appear on our work queue we will evaluate them accordingly. You should check your TEACH account periodically to see if the status of your application has been updated. Login to your account, click on Account Information, Certificates and then Go. There you can click on your evaluation history to see if there have been any changes.

Please note that applications are valid for 3 years from the date they are submitted, or two manual evaluations - whichever comes first. If you do not satisfy the requirements within the lifetime of your application, your application will be disapproved and will no longer be active. If this happens, and if you wish to obtain that certificate in the future, you will have to submit a new application and application fee via your TEACH account. Then, you will have to submit documentation that satisfies all requirements listed on the application at that time.

For further information regarding the requirements and the status of your application for certification, check your TEACH Online Services account. For questions concerning this evaluation, email us at tcert@nysed.gov.

Sincerely,

Michael Nucci

Appendix B

Qualtrics Survey

Qualtrics Sampling Survey – Part I

Anonymous Survey

Instructions

Thank you for your interest in sharing your valuable knowledge for this survey, which seeks to better understand the certification and testing experiences of early childhood teachers and assistant teachers across New York City. This survey is open to all early childhood teachers and assistant teachers in New York City, whether or not you are certified. The survey asks questions about your background, education/training, testing experiences, and experiences as an early childhood teacher or assistant teacher, and it should take no more than 30 minutes to complete.

At the end of this survey (Phase I), you will be given a separate opportunity to confirm if you qualify to be interviewed for a longer, interview-based study (Phase II), and if you do qualify, to give your consent to be contacted regarding that study. If you are interested in being interviewed, you will need to provide basic contact information in a separate questionnaire at the end of this survey. However, all your answers in this survey will be kept separate from your questionnaire responses about the interview study. Since that is a separate form, all the information you provide in this survey will be anonymous. This survey will remain open until **June 30, 2018**, but the interview questionnaire will close on **March 21, 2018**. If you wish to go straight to the questionnaire, **click here** <insert link>. You have until June 30, 2018 to complete the survey.

Risks, Benefits, and Participation

Given that this an anonymous survey, there is no defined risk to you in participating; however, you may experience feelings of discomfort similar to the discomfort you may feel when talking with someone about test failure or low wages for teaching. There is no direct benefit to you for completing the survey, but your input could help inform policy about New York State teacher certification in early childhood care and education (ECE). This survey is completely voluntary.

If you decide you do not wish to submit your responses, you can exit the screen at any time or select **"quit,"** and your answers will not be recorded. By submitting your responses, you are indicating that you understand the above and you give permission for your anonymous responses to be used for research purposes. Thank you in advance for your participation in this survey.

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Gail Buffalo at 917-912-2262 or at pgr2112@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

Education, Training, and Teaching Philosophy

1. What is the highest level of education that you have obtained? *Please select one*.
- o Associate degree (AA, AS)
- o Bachelor's degree (BA, BS)
- o Master's degree
- o Doctoral degree
- o None of the above. *Please specify.*

2. Which of the following degrees, credentials, and/or certifications do you have? *Check all that apply.*
- o Child Development Associate (CDA)
- o Associate degree in early childhood education
- o Bachelor's degree in early childhood education
- o Bachelor's degree in special education
- o Bachelor's degree in elementary education
- o Master's degree in early childhood education
- o Master's degree in special education
- o Master's degree in elementary education
- o New York State license for assistant teacher in early childhood (any level)
- o New York State certification in early childhood education
- o New York State certification in special education
- o New York State certification in elementary education
- o New York State certification in early childhood education for New York City (I am a plaintiff in Gulino v. Board of Education)
- o New York State certification in special education for New York City (I am a plaintiff in Gulino v. Board of Education)
- o New York State certification in elementary teaching for New York City (I am a plaintiff in Gulino v. Board of Education)

- Other, including out-of-field and out-of-state certifications or credentials. *Please specify.*

- None of these
-

3. During your education and training specifically related to early childhood education, special education, and/or general education, which courses and/or workshops taught on specific topics do you remember taking? *Check all that apply.*

o Development in Early Childhood	o Teaching students with disabilities in the early years	o Dignity for All Students (DASA)
o Language and Literacy Acquisition	o Home-school relationships	o CORE body of knowledge
o Teaching Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers	o Teaching diverse early learners	o Common Core State Standards
o Foundations in Early Childhood	o Teaching early learners in urban contexts	o Montessori
o Teaching reading and/or literacy to young children	o Issues and/or problems in early childhood education	o Reggio Emilia
o Teaching math to young children	o Curriculum and curriculum development in early childhood education	o Creative Curriculum
o Teaching science to young children	o Teacher research in early childhood education	o Multilingual, bilingual, and/or English language learners
o Teaching the expressive arts to young children	o First Aid/CPR	o NYC Pre-K Explore
o Music and movement with young children	o School violence and prevention	o Bank Street Developmental Interactive Approach

- Teaching social studies to young children
- Using data to support children's needs
- Lesson Planning
- Child abuse: Mandated reporter's
- Social and Emotional Development
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System
- High/Scope
- Teacher child interactions
- Program for Infant and Toddler Care I-IV

Other: *Please specify.*

4. Of the courses, workshops, professional developments trainings and other trainings that you have taken part in, which of these experiences, do you feel, most prepared you to become an early childhood teacher or assistant teacher? *Check all that apply.*

- Development in Early Childhood
- Language and Literacy Acquisition
- Teaching Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers
- Foundations in Early Childhood
- Teaching reading and/or literacy to young children
- Teaching math to young children
- Teaching students with disabilities in the early years
- Home-school relationships
- Teaching diverse early learners
- Teaching early learners in urban contexts
- Issues and/or problems in early childhood education
- Curriculum and curriculum development in early childhood education
- Dignity for All Students (DASA)
- CORE body of knowledge
- Common Core State Standards
- Montessori
- Reggio Emilia
- Creative Curriculum

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- Music and movement with young children
- Teaching social studies to young children
- Using data to support children's needs
- Lesson Planning
- Teacher research in early childhood education
- First Aid/CPR
- School violence and prevention
- Child abuse: Mandated reporter's
- Social and Emotional Development
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System
- Multilingual, bilingual, and/or English language learners
- NYC Pre-K Explore
- Bank Street Developmental Interactive Approach
- High/Scope
- Teacher child interactions
- Program for Infant and Toddler Care I-IV

Other: *Please specify.*

a. *Please briefly explain why.*

5. What were your educational *internship* experiences, including those in your own classroom?
    a. In what areas did you complete educational internships (school-assigned field experiences and/or practice not including student teaching)? *Check all that apply*.

○ Early Childhood Internships (Not in your own classroom)	○ Early Childhood Internships (In your own classroom)	○ Special Education Internships	○ Elementary Education Internships	○ Out-of-field Internships (e.g. Physical Education)

b. How many total WEEKS did you spend in educational internships (school-assigned field experience and/or practice not including student teaching)? *If you don't remember exactly, please estimate*. **[RULE highlight columns that coordinate to answer 5a.]**

Early Childhood Internships (Not in your own classroom)	Early Childhood Internships (In your own classroom)	Special Education Internships	Elementary Education Internships	Out-of-field Internships (e.g. Physical Education)
○ No hours	○ No hours	○ No hours	○ No hours	○ No hours
○ 1-15 hours	○ 1-15 hours	○ 1-15 hours	○ 1-15 hours	○ 1-15 hours
○ 16-30 hours	○ 16-30 hours	○ 16-30 hours	○ 16-30 hours	○ 16-30 hours
○ 31-45 hours	○ 31-45 hours	○ 31-45 hours	○ 31-45 hours	○ 31-45 hours
○ 46-60 hours	○ 46-60 hours	○ 46-60 hours	○ 46-60 hours	○ 46-60 hours
○ More than 60 hours	○ More than 60 hours	○ More than 60 hours	○ More than 60 hours	○ More than 60 hours

6. What were your *student teaching* experiences, including those inside your own classroom?
    a. In what areas did you complete student teaching? *Check all that apply.*

○ Early Childhood Student Teaching (Not in your own classroom)	○ Early Childhood Student Teaching (In your own classroom)	○ Special Education Student Teaching	○ Elementary Education Student Teaching	○ Out-of-field Student Teaching (e.g. Physical Education)

b. How many total WEEKS did you spend in student teaching? Keep in mind that one typical semester is 15 weeks long. *If you don't remember exactly, please estimate*. **[RULE highlight columns that coordinate to answer 6a.]**

Early Childhood Student Teaching (Not in your own classroom)	Early Childhood Student Teaching (In your own classroom)	Special Education Student Teaching	Elementary Education Student Teaching	Out-of-field Student Teaching (e.g. Physical Education)
○ 0 weeks	○ 0 weeks	○ 0 weeks	○ 0 weeks	○ 0 weeks
○ 1-4 weeks	○ 1-4 weeks	○ 1-4 weeks	○ 1-4 weeks	○ 1-4 weeks
○ 5-7 weeks	○ 5-7 weeks	○ 5-7 weeks	○ 5-7 weeks	○ 5-7 weeks
○ 8-10 weeks	○ 8-10 weeks	○ 8-10 weeks	○ 8-10 weeks	○ 8-10 weeks
○ 11-14 weeks	○ 11-14 weeks	○ 11-14 weeks	○ 11-14 weeks	○ 11-14 weeks
○ 15-18 weeks	○ 15-18 weeks	○ 15-18 weeks	○ 15-18 weeks	○ 15-18 weeks
○ 19-22 weeks	○ 19-22 weeks	○ 19-22 weeks	○ 19-22 weeks	○ 19-22 weeks
○ 23-26 weeks	○ 23-26 weeks	○ 23-26 weeks	○ 23-26 weeks	○ 23-26 weeks
○ 27-30 weeks	○ 27-30 weeks	○ 27-30 weeks	○ 27-30 weeks	○ 27-30 weeks
○ More than 30 weeks	○ More than 30 weeks	○ More than 30 weeks	○ More than 30 weeks	○ More than 30 weeks

7. Of the all internships and field experiences, including student teaching, that you have taken part in, which of these experiences do you feel most prepared you to become an early childhood teacher or assistant teacher? *Check all that apply.*

○ Early Childhood Internships (Not in your own classroom)	○ Early Childhood Internships (In your own classroom)	○ Special Education Internships	○ Elementary Education Internships	○ Out-of-field Internships (e.g. Physical Education)
○ Early Childhood Student Teaching (Not in your own classroom)	○ Early Childhood Student Teaching (In your own classroom)	○ Special Education Student Teaching	○ Elementary Education Student Teaching	○ Out-of-field Student Teaching (e.g. Physical Education)

Please briefly explain why.

8. Now, thinking about your own experiences, outside of formal teacher education and practice: Outside of your formal education, training, practice, and field experiences, including student teaching, that you have taken part in, what personal experiences and/or experiences as a classroom teacher, assistant teacher, or paraprofessional do you feel has most improved or impacted your ability to teach or assistant teach in early childhood education? *Please briefly explain why.*

9. Thinking about all the courses, workshops, professional development trainings and field experiences including student teaching that you have taken part in AND all the personal and/or teaching experiences that you have had, what additional education and/ or trainings do you think would most like make you a better early childhood teacher or assistant teacher? *Please briefly explain why.*

10. How advanced do you consider yourself as a teacher or assistant teacher of early childhood? *Please check one.*
    - o I consider myself a novice. I am still learning how to teach.
    - o I consider myself "intermediate." I have learned the basics of how to teach, and I help other teachers, but I think I still have a lot to learn!
    - o I consider myself a "master" teacher. I have a lot of experience, and I help several other teachers to improve on their teaching.
    - o None of these describe me. I would describe myself as: *Please specify.*

Testing Experiences and Support for Certification

11. Were you fully certified in New York State prior to 2014 OR did you receive your certification before or after 2014 through New York State *reciprocity* with another state in order to be certified? This means that you did not have to take <u>any new exams</u> in order to be certified in New York State and that you completed

three years of teaching experience as a licensed teacher in the state where you were originally licensed.

- NO, I was not certified in New York State prior to 2014 and/or I did not receive/have not received certification through reciprocity as an out-of-state candidate since 2014. If you were not certified in 2014 in New York State and/or have not received reciprocity since 2014, please continue and answer the other questions in this section.

- YES, I was first certified in New York State in 2014 or earlier. *If yes, please describe, in the space provided, to the best of your ability, the certification requirements for your New York State certification*. After Answering this question, you can SKIP all other questions in this section. **[Rule: Auto-skip other questions in this section.]**

- YES: I was first certified outside of New York State and received my New York State certification through reciprocity before or after 2014. *If yes, please describe, in the space provided, to the best of your ability, the testing and certification requirements for the state where you were certified before obtaining certification in New York State. If you completed an edTPA for your state certification, please include information about that as well.* After Answering this question, you can SKIP all other questions in this section. **[Rule: Auto-skip other questions in this section.]**

12. Which of the following NEW exams (since 2014) for New York State early childhood teacher certification have you either taken, taken but not yet passed, and passed? Please indicate the number of times you have taken each exam and the highest score you earned. *If you don't remember, please estimate.*

	NOT TAKEN/NOT REQUIRED	NOT PASSED	PASSED	TOTAL TIMES TAKEN	HIGHEST SCORE
Educating All Students	○	○	○	_____	_____ (400-600 range)
CST English Language Arts Birth-2nd Grade	○	○	○	_____	_____ (400-600 range)
CST Math Birth-2nd Grade	○	○	○	_____	_____ (400-600 range)
CST Arts & Sciences	○	○	○	_____	_____ (400-600 range)
CST Students with Disabilities	○	○	○	_____	_____ (400-600 range)
edTPA – Early Childhood	○	○	○	_____	_____ (0-75 range)
edTPA – Special Education	○	○	○	_____	_____ (0-75 range)

edTPA – Elementary Education	○	○	○		(0-90 range)
edTPA – Other *Please specify.*	○	○	○		(0-75 range)

New York State Teacher Certification (New) Exams	**Length (minutes)**	**Price**
Educating All Students	180	$92
Content Specialty Test 211 – English Language Arts	120	$65
Content Specialty Test 212 – Math	150	$65
Content Specialty Test 245 – Arts & Sciences	60	$49
Content Specialty Test 060 – Students with Disabilities	255	$134
edTPA	Not Timed	$300

Figure 1 Reference Table for Cost of Current New York State Certification Exams

13. In total, how much of your own money would you say that you have spent in trying to pass the new certification exams? This includes paying to take exams and any money you have spent on tutoring or test preparation.

- ○ I haven't spent any of my own money to pass certification exams.
- ○ $250 or less
- ○ $251-$500
- ○ $501-$1000
- ○ $1001-$1500
- ○ $1501-$2000
- ○ $2001-$2500
- ○ $2501-$3000
- ○ More than $3000

14. Which of the above tests do you consider the most difficult or challenging? *Please explain why.*
    - ○ Educating All Students Exam
    - ○ Content Specialty Test 211 – English Language Arts B-2
    - ○ Content Specialty Test 212 – Math B-2
    - ○ Content Specialty Test 245 – Arts & Sciences
    - ○ Content Specialty Test 060 – Students with Disabilities
    - ○ edTPA
    - ○ None of the above
    - ○ I haven't taken any of these exams, so I don't know.

15. Which of these tests, if any, do you consider to be closely related to your role as an early childhood teacher or assistant teacher? *Please check all that apply.*
    - ○ Educating All Students Exam
    - ○ Content Specialty Test 211 – English Language Arts
    - ○ Content Specialty Test 212 – Math
    - ○ Content Specialty Test 245 – Arts & Sciences
    - ○ Content Specialty Test 060 – Students with Disabilities
    - ○ edTPA
    - ○ None of the above
    - ○ I haven't taken any of these exams, so I don't know.

16. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements related to the relevance and/or fairness of the certification process?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The New York State Teacher certification exams ask questions related to my work as a teacher or assistant teacher.	○	○	○	○	○
The New York State teacher certification exams provide enough time for me to answer all questions fully.	○	○	○	○	○

The New York State teacher certification exam process is clear and easy to understand.	○	○	○	○	○
The New York State teacher certification exam process is a good use of teachers' time.	○	○	○	○	○
The New York State teacher certification exams should be required for ECE teacher certification.	○	○	○	○	○

17. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your experiences with the certification and testing?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Being able to afford exams or test preparation is a factor in why I am not certified.	○	○	○	○	○
Having time to prepare for exams is a factor in why I am not certified.	○	○	○	○	○
The testing format is a factor in why I am not certified.	○	○	○	○	○
The content of test questions is a factor in why I am not certified.	○	○	○	○	○
I have time to answer all questions when I take certification exams.	○	○	○	○	○

My specific learning disability or other health impairment is a factor in why I am not certified.	○	○	○	○	○
The online certification system is easy to navigate.	○	○	○	○	○
I have been able to register for my exams without trouble.	○	○	○	○	○
I feel pressured by my current employer to pass exams.	○	○	○	○	○
The burden of taking certification exams makes me not want to be a teacher.	○	○	○	○	○

18. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ways in which you have been supported to become certified?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
My employer provides financial support for me to become certified.	○	○	○	○	○
My employer provides leave time or other non-financial supports for me to become certified.	○	○	○	○	○
My employer should provide more support for me to become certified.	○	○	○	○	○

The school where I graduated from provides support for my certification.	○	○	○	○	○
The school where I graduated from should provide more support for my certification.	○	○	○	○	○
My union provides support for my certification.	○	○	○	○	○
My union should provide more support for my certification.	○	○	○	○	○
I receive support for certification apart from the school where I teach, the school I graduated from, or my union.	○	○	○	○	○
The total supports that I receive for certification are adequate to help me become certified.	○	○	○	○	○

Early Childhood Teaching and Certification-related Experiences

19. Including the current school year, how many combined years of experience do you have as an assistant teacher or teacher of children ages 0-5 in an early childhood care and education center or school either insider or outside of New York City? **[Rule: skip question 20 if six or fewer total years of experience]**

- ○ Less than one year
- ○ 1-2 years
- ○ 3-6 years
- ○ 7-10 years
- ○ 11-20 years
- ○ 21 or more years

20. Including the current school year, how many years have you worked as an assistant teacher or teacher in early childhood in a *New York City*-based early care and education center, Head Start, private school or Department of Education school?

- o Less than one year
- o 1-2 years
- o 3-5 years
- o 6-10 years
- o 11-20 years
- o 21 or more years

21. How many years have you been with your current employer?
- o Less than one year
- o 1-2 years
- o 3-5 years
- o 6-10 years
- o 11-20 years
- o 21 or more years

22. Are you or have you ever been a *lead* teacher in early childhood from two-years old to Pre-Kindergarten (or Universal Pre-Kindergarten) either inside or outside of New York City? **[Rule: Skip questions #24 and #25 if answer to this question is no.]**
- o Yes
- o No

23. Are you currently lead-teaching in a New York City Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom? **[Rule: Skip question 25 if answer to question 24 is "no."]**

- o Yes
- o No

24. If you are currently lead-teaching in a New York City Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom, what, if any, is your prior elementary school experience?
    a. Did you teach in a public elementary school inside or outside of New York State before entering your current position?
        - o Yes
        - o No
    b. If yes, how many years did you teach elementary school?

25. Would you say that you have missed job opportunities or been demoted because you are not yet certified?
    - Yes
    - No

- *If yes, in the blank, please describe the situation to the extent you are comfortable to share this information.*

Work Environment, Compensation, and Benefits

26. Please continue to indicate how much you agree/disagree with the following statements about your job.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My workday schedule is consistent.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I do not worry about being paid on time.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
My days off and vacation time are paid for.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I am happy with my insurance plan.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I feel challenged at work.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

27. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your job? Remember all responses will be kept confidential.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am under a lot of pressure at work.	❍	❍	❍	❍
"Red tape," and required paperwork absorb too much of my time.	❍	❍	❍	❍
The amount of work I have to get done makes it difficult to do my best.	❍	❍	❍	❍
I worry about school problems while at home.	❍	❍	❍	❍
I spend a lot of time outside of school planning classroom activities.	❍	❍	❍	❍
I have adequate planning time.	❍	❍	❍	❍
I am often frustrated at work.	❍	❍	❍	❍

Figure 1 From Early Childhood Teacher Experiences Survey (Fantuzzo 2012)

28. How much PAID vacation time, including all paid holidays, do you get throughout the year?
    - One week or less
    - Two weeks or less
    - Three weeks or less
    - Four weeks or less
    - Five weeks or less
    - Six weeks or less
    - Seven weeks or less
    - Eight weeks or less
    - Ten weeks or less
    - More than 10 weeks

29. What is your current annual salary?

    - Less than $25,000
    - $25,000-$29,999
    - $30,000-$34,999
    - $35,000-$39,999
    - $40,000-$44,999
    - $45,000-$49,999
    - $50,000-$59,999
    - $60,000-$69,999
    - $70,000-$79,999
    - $80,000-$89,999
    - $90,000-$99,999
    - More than $100,000

30. What kind of health insurance or health care coverage do you have? *Please choose one.*

- ❍ Private health insurance from your employer
- ❍ Private health insurance from a spouse's employer
- ❍ Private health insurance from union
- ❍ Private health insurance purchased directly
- ❍ Medicaid
- ❍ Medicare
- ❍ Military/ VA or Champus/Tricare/Champ-VA
- ❍ I don't have insurance
- ❍ Other (please specify): _____

31. Now, I'm going to present a series of statements describing things people worry about. I'd like you to tell me how much you agree or disagree with each statement on a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 represents strong disagreement and 6 represents strong agreement.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree 6
I worry about having enough money to pay my family's monthly bills.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I worry about having enough food for my family.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I worry about paying for routine health care costs for myself and family.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I worry about paying for transportation to and from work.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I worry about paying for housing.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I worry about having enough savings for retirement.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Figure 1 Economic Security Index (Whitebook, Phillips, and Howes, 2014)

32. What, if any, is your union status and affiliation?

- Are you a member of a union (such as the UFT or District Council 1707)? Circle one.

  Yes No

- What union? _____

33. Does your employer or union contribute to any kind of retirement plan for you? Please choose one.
    - Neither
    - Employer
    - Union
    - Both
    - I have a retirement plan but am unsure who contributes.

School and Community

34. For each of the following items, please enter a number (e.g. 15) in the box.

	Number of children
How many children are enrolled in your classroom?	_____
How many children in your classroom are Hispanic or Latino?	_____
How many children in your classroom are black or African-American?	_____
How many children in your classroom are Asian or Asian American?	_____
How many children in your classroom are white?	_____
How many children in your classroom are of mixed race/ethnicity?	_____
How many children in your classroom have IEPs?	_____
How many children in your classroom are absent on a typical day?	_____
How many children in your classroom are English language learners?	_____

35. What languages do children speak in your classroom? Check all that apply.

❑ English
❑ Spanish
❑ Mandarin / Cantonese
❑ Arabic
❑ Haitian Creole
❑ Urdu
❑ Other (please specify all:) _____

36. Do you ever require a translator to speak with parents or children at your school?

Yes No

37. How close does the majority of students in your classroom live to where the school is located? *If you don't know exactly, please estimate.*

o 10 blocks or less
o less than 1 mile
o 1-2 miles
o 3-4 miles
o 5 or more miles

38. How close do *you* live to the school where you teach or assistant teach?
- 10 blocks or less
- less than 1 mile
- 1-2 miles
- 3-4 miles
- 5 or more miles

39. How often do you shop in the neighborhood where your program is located? Circle one.
Never Sometimes Often

40. Does your site have any classrooms that primarily serve 3-year-old children in the year before Pre-K? Circle one.
Yes No

Demographic and Personal Information: I'd like to conclude with some personal questions and questions about how you identify yourself.

41. Do you identify with a specific racial or ethnic group? *If yes, in the blank, please describe how would you identify yourself.*
- Yes
- No

42. Was English the primary language you spoke with your family at home when you were growing up?
- Yes
- No

43. Do you identify as a woman, as a man, or neither?
- Man
- Woman
- Non-conforming
- Other: _____

44. How many years have you been alive?
- 30 years or less
- 31-40 years
- 41-50 years
- More than 50 years

45. What languages, if any, besides English, do you speak fluently? Check all that apply. Use the space below to write in any languages that you speak fluently that do not appear on the list, or are non-specific in the list such as "African languages."

○ African languages (please specify)	○ Hindi	○ Other Slavic languages	○ Serbo Croatian
○ Arabic	○ Italian ○	○ Other and unspecified languages	○ Spanish
○ Chinese – Cantonese ○	○ Japanese	○ Other West Germanic languages	○ Tagalog
○ Chinese – Mandarin ○	○ Korean	○ Persian	○ Thai
○ French	○ Laotian	○ Polish	○ Urdu
○ French Creole	○ Mon Khmer Cambodian	○ Portuguese	○ Vietnamese
○ German	○ Other Asian languages (Please Specify)	○ Portuguese Creole	○ Yiddish
○ Greek	○ Other Indic languages	○ Russian	○ Other *Please specify:* _____
○ Hebrew	○ Other Indo-European languages	○ Scandinavian Languages (Please specify).	○ Other *Please specify:* _____

46. Can you tell me about your marital status and living situation? Please choose one.
    - ○ Married
    - ○ Unmarried but living with a romantic partner
    - ○ Unmarried but living with an adult relative
    - ○ Other arrangement

47. How many children under age 5 live in your household?

_____

48. How many children ages 6-18 live in your household?

_____

49. Could you give an estimate of your annual household income, including your own income and all others who contribute? Is it… Please choose one.

- ❍ $0-30,000
- ❍ $31,000-40,000
- ❍ $41,000-50,000
- ❍ $51,000-60,000
- ❍ $61,000-70,000
- ❍ $71,000-80,000
- ❍ $81,000-90,000
- ❍ $91,000-100,000
- ❍ Over $100,000

50. Do you currently receive financial or in-kind assistance from any government programs for needy families, such as cash assistance for disabilities, housing assistance, free-reduced lunch for your children, or food stamps? Circle one.
Yes No

51. If you have any additional comments related to certification requirements and/or certification tests required for certification, please add them in the blank provided below. Your input is valued!

SUBMISSION

Your anonymous submission of these responses is completely voluntary. Do you give permission for your responses to be used in this study?

- Yes I give permission for my anonymous responses to be used. [SUBMIT SURVEY LINK]

- No, I do not wish for my responses to be used. I wish to quit the survey without sharing my responses. [QUIT SURVEY LINK]

SUBMIT SURVEY Part I [LANDING PAGE]

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!

This survey will be used to compare your certification experiences to those of other early childhood teachers and assistant teachers in New York City. However, the survey is only the beginning of my research. As stated in the recruitment email [insert link to copy of letter], I am also conducting a series of five interviews with up to 10 teachers who fit additional requirements to learn even more about your experiences. If you want to learn more about that research and how you might participate in it, please click on the link below. There is no obligation to participate.

I want to learn more about the interview study [Insert Link]

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Gail Buffalo at 917-912-2262 or at pgr2112@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

QUIT SURVEY Part I [LANDING PAGE]

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST IN THIS SURVEY.

Your responses have not been recorded at this time, because you indicated that you did not give your permission for them to be recorded. However, if you change your mind and wish to submit your answers at a later time, this survey will be open through ***June 30, 2018***

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Gail Buffalo at 917-912-2262 or at pgr2112@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000

INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: HOW SIX NEW YORK CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS CONSTRUCT NEW YORK STATE TEACHER CERTIFICATION IN TERMS OF THEIR TEACHING QUALITY: A CRITICAL RACE NARRATIVE ANALYSIS
Focus Group Consent or Interview Consent
Principal Investigator: Gail Russell Buffalo
917-912-2262, pgr2112@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in this research study called "HOW SIX NEW YORK CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS CONSTRUCT NEW YORK STATE TEACHER CERTIFICATION IN TERMS OF THEIR TEACHING QUALITY: A CRITICAL RACE NARRATIVE ANALYSIS."
You may qualify to take part in this research study because of a number of reasons. First, you have experience teaching early childhood education in New York City and are currently working in a New York City Early Education Center (NYCEE). Next, you self-identify as belonging to a minoritized group (defined as a person of Color group or from a group whose primarily language is not "dominant" American English). Third, you have expressed that you have failed at least one of the NYSTCE exams at least three times. Finally, you have worked with me on test preparation in the past. Approximately six people will participate in this study and it will take 8 hours of your time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to determine (A) how early childhood teachers define teaching quality given certification requirements in New York State and New York City and (B) how the New York State Teacher Certification examinations and edTPA impact teacher identified as part of a minoritized community.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to do the following:

- Personal Interviews. You will be interviewed by me 3 times, one-on-one. During the interview, you will be asked to share some uncomfortable information about the exams in general, your experiences as a minoritized individual and its impact on your experiences of the exams. I will also ask how you define teaching quality. All of this will be asked within the larger context of requirements for teachers to be certified in order to teach UPK. Each interview will be audio-recorded. Once the audio-recording is written down (transcribed), the audio-recording will be deleted. So that this can be used confidentially, you will select a pseudonym or be assigned a false name/de-identified code in order to keep your identity confidential. **If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate.**

- Focus Group. After the personal interviews, I will lead a focus group of 6 teachers, like yourself who also are participating in the study, who will discuss their experiences with the certification exams and how they define teaching quality. This will last approximately 2 hours and will be video-recorded and written down (transcribed). Afterwards, the video recording segments containing your contributions will be reviewed and approved by both of us. Once those contributions are approved and after I have met with all six participants, video screen shots of the focus group will be taken (all identifying images will be blurred out), to be used together with the transcriptions. Once this is done, the video will be destroyed. **If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate.**

- Final Check-In. Finally, you will be asked to complete a video recall session. This will take about 45 minutes, and you will have the opportunity to clarify any of your points made in the previous interview. Like the interviews, this will be audio-recorded. After the audio-recording is written down (transcribed) the audio-recording will be deleted. All of these procedures will be done at Teachers College, 525 W 120th St. room 308, or 200 Broadway, 3rd floor in room 3-C at a time that is convenient to you.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

In general, this is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider:

You may be asked to discuss embarrassing issues. You might feel embarrassed to discuss problems or painful memories regarding the certification tests, the preparation for the tests and what happened after taking the test. However, you will not be required to answer any question or discuss anything that you don't want to talk about. Furthermore, you may stop your participation in the study at any time.

Information disclosed in the personal interviews may not stay confidential. While I will take steps to keep your information confidential, I cannot completely guarantee its confidentiality. I will password protect your information on my computer and keep such computer locked. However, none of these methods can entirely erase the risk of computer failure, human failure, hacking or any other way in which electronic information may become public. If any of your information does become public, it is possible that such information could get back to your principal.

Information disclosed in the focus groups have an added confidentiality risk. Information that you disclose during a focus group bear an increased risk of lost confidentiality, as I cannot guarantee that focus group participants will protect one another's confidentiality. To protect against this risk, we will discuss issues of confidentiality at the beginning of the focus group session, and participants will be encouraged to avoid topics that require absolute discretion. If any of your information does become public, it is possible that such information could get back to your principal.

The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of teacher education to better understand the best way to train history teachers. However, there are some possible benefits to consider:

Shared experiences may provide additional insight to the tests. Sharing experiences with others about the certification exams may provide you with additional insight about how others approached the tests. It may cause you to see the tests differently. It could

also confirm your feelings about the exams. Either way, you could be exposed to a broad spectrum of experiences that may give you a wider perspective on the tests.

Shared experiences may provide additional insight about yourself and your approach to the test. Talking to others about how you prepared for the exams as well as the pressures you felt before and after the test may confirm your feelings about how you see yourself in relation to the exams. The exams hold a great deal at stake—financial impact, perception of you by others, career ramifications and feelings about your worth as a teacher. Talking with others may give you an insight about these things to which you would not otherwise be exposed.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate; however, your transportation costs (or time and effort) will be covered. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when you have completed the interview, focus group and filled out the questionnaire. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you haven't finished. You will still be paid for time/your transportation costs.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of my dissertation.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING

Audio recording and video recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, (choose the correct sentence) you will still be able to participate in this study or you will not be able to participate in this research study.

_____I give my consent to be recorded

Signed:_____

Name:_____

_____I **do not** consent to be recorded

Signed:_____

Name:_____

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___I consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College

Signed:_____

Name:_____

___I **do not** consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University

Signed:_____

Name:_____

The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

Yes _____ No_____
Initial Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

Yes _____ No_____
Initial Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Gail Russell Buffalo at 917-912-2262 or at pgr2112@tc.columbia.edu or the research coordinator, _____at 212-_____. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Souto-Manning at 212-_____.)

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his or her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: _____

Date: _____

Signature:

_____

Appendix D

Interview I Protocol

THEME: BACKGROUND EXPERIENCES

Opening Comments

Interviewer: *Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! As we have discussed, the reason I am conducting this study is to learn from teachers who have had difficulty passing the New York State certification exams, and in particular I am interested to learn from teachers who are multiply minoritized, e.g. teachers of Color, Multilingual teachers, and, of course, all the teachers in this study identify as female, so I am interested in gender as well. I am interested in learning from teachers about their experiences, because I believe the tests unfairly hold teachers back from earning certification, even after they have completed their education and have years of experience working with young children. This research study includes three one-on-one interviews, like we are doing now; a focus group interview, where everyone will come together for a discussion to reflect on the individual interviews and go deeper with the questions and ideas raised; and finally, we will meet together to review segments of the focus group interview to give you a chance to reflect in private about what happened during that interview. Our one-on-one interviews and the video recall session will be audio-recorded. The focus group interview will be video recorded, because there are multiple ways to participate in a group discussion besides talking, and I hope the video will capture these multiple ways of participating. Each individual interview will last approximately 90 minutes; the focus group interview will last 120-150 minutes; and, the video recall session will last approximately 45 minutes. We will have approximately one interview or session per month for the next five months.*

After today's interview, we will schedule our next interview for some time next month. I would like to remind you that you can drop out from the study at any time for any reason.

Before we get started, I wanted to let you know that your name/identity and anything that you discuss in these sessions as well as any other information, will be kept confidential throughout this process, and I am the only person who has access to this information. Once I begin to share my research and findings, I will use a pseudonym that you can choose for me to use.

If at any time when you are being interviewed, you need to take a break or reschedule a session, let me know. We can stop and/or reschedule at your convenience. Today's interview will take 90 minutes.

Before we get started, do you need anything, or do you have any questions?

Today's interview will be focused on gathering background information that we will use to inform our discussions in the future.

Your Identities

- As you think about who you are now and how you identify as a person, how would you describe yourself to another person?
- You mentioned that you are _____ (based on answer). Tell me more about that aspect of your identity. Why is that important to you?
- Would you say that there are any aspects to your identity that are the basis for other people to treat you differently?
    - If yes, can you name some of these aspects and talk about how they matter to you on an everyday level?
    - If no, why not? Can you say a little more?
- Which parts of your identity are most important to you? Why?

Interviewer: *Okay, based on what you have shared above, we will move into your background with school.*

Schooling Experiences

- As you look back on your experiences in school, what was it like being a/n _____ (select a minoritization based on prior interview segment)
    - *If no minoritization has been identified, a more general "grand tour" type of question will be asked, e.g. As you look back on your schooling experiences, can you talk a little about what it was like for you going to school when you were growing up?
        - If a minoritization is raised here, then follow up with the original question.
- How might your experiences have been different for other students who identify similarly to you? And, what about other students who would identify differently? How would their experiences have been different?
- Above, you mentioned _____ as an important basis for your being treated differently. Can you describe a few of your experiences in school that demonstrate this differential treatment?

Experiences of Teaching Quality

- Briefly describe some of the kinds of teachers did you have that you considered *qualified?* You can go back to college, your K-12 education. You can also think about your experiences as a parent (if applicable) and or colleague to other good teachers.

Closure

Interviewer: *Thank you so much for your time today. As a reminder, you are free to drop out of this study at any time if you so choose. As for our next meeting, I have our next meeting scheduled for _____. I will email to confirm. Meanwhile, please let me know if anything comes up on your end as well.*

Appendix E

Interview II Protocol

THEME: RELATED EXPERIENCES

Introduction

This will be filled in.

Member Check: REVIEW OF TRANSCRIPTS

Experiences with Tests

- Last time, I asked you talk about your experiences with school PK-12, but I did not go into your experiences as a test taker. What kinds of tests did you take when you were in school? Describe some of your prior experiences with tests.
    - And, how did your identity as _____ impact your experiences with the tests?
- Pick a time when you faced a specific challenge with taking tests and/or exams. Describe your experience of those challenges and how you addressed problems you encountered.
- Now, when you started taking tests for your teaching certification, describe some of these experiences.
- Can you describe an experience you have had with the certification tests that you would consider positive? Why do you think it was positive?
    - Can you describe any prior experiences that you had had that helped make this experience a positive one?
- Now, can you describe an experience you have had with the certification tests that you would consider either particularly negative or challenging?
    - How have you coped with or addressed that challenge?
- Is there anything more you would like to say about this?

Defining Teaching Quality

Now I want to ask just a few questions about how you would define teaching quality. We will discuss this more in the focus group interview as well.

- Can you walk me through a day where you knew you were a high-quality teacher?
    - What made you think/know you were a strong teacher?
- Can you walk me through a day where you questioned your teaching ability?
- Can you describe a time when someone else made you believe you were a high-quality teacher?

- And, can you describe a time when someone else made you doubt your teaching ability?
- What would you say is the most important way you decide from day to day how you think about your teaching quality? Can you give an example?

Thank you for your time today. Before we go, do you have any questions or comments, or anything else that you'd like to add?

Appendix F

Interview III Protocol

THEME: REFLECTION ON EXPERIENCE

Introduction

Interviewer: *Once again, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to learn from your experiences. Today is our last full-length interview before the focus group. Do you have any questions before we get started?*

Reflection on Experiences with the Tests

- In the first interview, you mentioned that _____ is one of the most important ways that you identify yourself. How do you think that being _____ impacted your experiences of teacher certification exams? Can you think of other identities that we have or have not discussed that have impacted your experiences of these tests?
- Can you describe some of the ways you have talked with colleagues and friends about the experience of teacher certification? How do you connect your interpretation of your experience to what you see as the major problems with certification testing?
- If you could change one thing about the certification process for early childhood teachers, what would you change?
    - Why?
    - Can you connect that to any of the experiences you have had that we have discussed?
- Finally, what challenges to you think other teachers who aren't certified will face with their teacher certification and what advice would you give to them?

Overall Impact

- What impact does being certified/not certified impact how you think about your teaching quality?
- In the last interview, you mentioned that _____ gives you a strong sense of your teaching quality, what aspects of your life experiences allowed you to become that type of teacher?
    - *If question is "too big," I would break it up in terms of:
        - school experiences
        - out-of-school experiences
        - college
        - teacher preparation
        - help or guidance from friends and colleagues
        - experiences of being minoritized in ___ ways

- In what ways does your experience of _____ in relation to Article 47/New York State laws regarding UPK certification impact how you see yourself as a strong teacher?
- Based on your experiences and opinions we have discussed in all the interviews so far, is Article 47/New York State laws regarding UPK certification fair rule for measuring teacher quality in early childhood settings? Why or why not?
- In what ways do you think that these experiences have shaped how you think about yourself now, especially as a _____ person?

Conclusion

Interviewer: *That wraps up our interview for today. The focus group has been scheduled for _____. Again, I will reach out to you before that time to send you transcripts and see if you have any questions before then. Do you have any questions, either about the focus group or other aspects of the research before we conclude today?*

Appendix G

Focus Group Interview Protocol

THEME: CO-CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF TESTS AND DEFINITIONS OF TEACHING QUALITY.

Introduction

Interviewer: *Hi everybody! Thank you for traveling and giving your time to participate in today's focus group. The focus group will last approximately two hours. If at any time you feel uncomfortable or need to step out, feel free to do so. Also, you are not required to share anything that makes you uncomfortable as we cannot guarantee confidentiality. As a reminder, you have all agreed to protect each other's right to privacy in what we discuss today. Also, once I have analyzed data from today's focus group, the video will be destroyed. Are there any questions before we get started?*

Warm Up

1. Please share your first name and something interesting about your experience in early childhood.
2. Each of you has now been interviewed three times, and you were asked essentially the same questions. To help us get acquainted with each other, please share something from one of the three interviews that you think is most important to your teaching quality and certification.

Teaching Quality

3. Each of you has accomplished some success in your teaching and on the certification exams. What would you say is the definition of achievement in the early care centers where you work?
    a. Can you share examples of when someone at your school recognized another person's achievement?
    b. How did you know that the person had achieved something important professionally?
    c. How do your stories of these examples compare and contrast? [Maybe use Venn Diagram as a prop]
    d. How is your racial or linguistic identity to how you think about your accomplishments?
4. Before today's interview, I asked that you bring at least one document that you believe reflects your center's views about teaching quality. I'd like each of you to talk about your document and compare that to how you define teaching quality personally.
    a. What are your questions/comments for other members of the group?

5. Each of the centers where you work abides by some combination of New York State law for UPK and New York City regulations under Article 47, both defining the requirements for qualified teachers. Can you talk some about how these definitions of qualified teachers impact how professional accomplishments are defined at your school?
    a. Can you give some examples?
    b. How do these examples compare and contrast with how teachers and administrators as your center define professional achievement? How to these examples compare across this group?
    c. Is professional achievement and teaching quality the same or different? Why?

The Tests

6. Okay, let's talk some about the certification tests! In addition to experiencing some success on the exams, each of you has had some difficulty with them as well.
    a. How would you define success when it comes to the New York State Teacher Certification Exams (NYSTCE) and the edTPA?
    b. How would you define failure?
    c. What do you consider to be the most important aspects for you in talking about the NYSTCE tests?
    d. How would you describe the relationship, if you think there is one, between your experiences as a minoritized person and taking the tests?
    e. How would you compare your experiences with one another?
7. How have the NYSTCE tests and edTPA impacted your schools and communities in any ways that you and/or your co-workers consider important? If so how?
    a. Can you give examples?
    b. Do you see minoritization or multiple minoritization being a factor in these effects? If so, how?
8. Are the tests important? Why or why not?
    a. Based on what you have said today/tonight and over the course of the individual interviews, what changes would you propose to the current testing teacher model? Why?
    b. How would your proposed changes impact your fellow-teachers, your schools and your communities?

WRAP UP: CONNECT TO Minoritization

9. As you know, this study addresses the ways in which minoritized early childhood teachers experience the certification tests and define teaching quality. I define minoritized teacher as _____. Following up on your three interviews, and now the focus group, what is the most important way in which you believe your minoritization has impacted your experience of the tests?
10. Before we conclude today's discussion, what final questions or comments do you have for the group?

Conclusion:

Interviewer: *Thank you for taking the time to talk to each other about what can be a very stressful topic. I value your time and knowledge. Thank you also for allowing us to record the session. Once I have reviewed the tape from today, I will pick out some excerpts for us to discuss individually, and we will find a time convenient for you to review. If you have anything that you know you would like to add to today's discussion, please make a note of that and bring it with you to the video recall session.*

Appendix H

Methods Crosswalk

Research Questions	Sources/Methods	Analysis/Potential Conclusions
1. How do intersectionally minoritized ECE teachers who have experienced licensure test failure in New York State (NYS) define professional achievement in early childhood education? a. How do these teachers negotiate official definitions of qualified teacher under Article 47 of the New York City Health Code and NYS's UPK legislation with their own understandings of what makes them qualified? b. How do these teachers respond to claims that they are not qualified because of licensure test failure?	In-depth, individual interview I, II & III/transcripts Member checks/ transcripts Video Focus Group Interview/transcripts Video recall sessions/transcripts Fieldnotes and log Documents that teachers share	Co-created "in-process" CNAs Use CRT, critical whiteness and Dominguez's (2017) decolonizing teacher education to inform analysis • Teachers could highlight injustices in the system of credentialing and they could produce either counter-stories or majoritarian stories CNA, including what teachers consider to be critical to professional achievement in their context
2. How do intersectionally minoritized early childhood teachers who have experienced licensure test failure in NYS co-construct and/or co-construct knowledge about the problem of teacher licensure test failure? a. What do these teachers see and experience as the local consequences of teacher licensure and testing policies in NYS? b. What solutions do these teachers collectively identify as important to solving problems with teacher licensure test failure on exams? c. How do these teachers construct and/or narrate their journeys experiencing failure and success?	In-depth, individual interview I, II & III/transcripts Member checks/ transcripts Focus Group Interview/transcripts (including video transcripts) Video recall sessions/transcripts Fieldnotes Documents that teachers share Field log	Co-created "in-process" CNAs Use CRT to analyze new co-configurations of problems. • Teachers could highlight injustices in the system of credentialing and they could produce either counter-stories or majoritarian stories CNA, including the identification of what teachers consider to be critical to professional achievement in their context

Validity Threats and Responses to VT
1. The effects of whiteness are the greatest validity threat imaginable, my own and anything else within the field of the study that could serve to silence teachers. 2. Influence of larger discourses on teachers may prevent teachers from countering official definitions of teaching. 3. Limitation of time, space, and relationship: Teachers may not name or use the discourses that are most important to them. Teachers may not be comfortable sharing discourses that are most important to them. 4. Another limitation will be my assumptions about what I think I know about the discourse the teachers prioritize. I will take the following steps to ensure that the data is able to answer my research questions: • Use of multiple member checks, video focus group, and video recall session • Critical whiteness journal • Critical friend o Discuss and share concerns raised in my journal o "Audit" research data and interpretations so that she can identify new areas for concern or locate additional considerations for follow up as needed • Use field notes, field log, and documents to develop questions to ask for the member check and focus group interview

Appendix I

Audio Transcription Rules[1]

.	The period indicates a falling, or final, intonation contour, not necessarily the end of a sentence.
?	The question mark indicates rising intonations, not necessarily a question.
,	The comma indicates "continuing" intonation, not necessarily a clear boundary.
:::	Colons indicate stretching of the preceding sound, proportional to the number of colons
-	A hyphen after a word or a part of a word indicates a cut-off or self-interruption
word	Underlining indicates some form of stress or emphasis on the underlined item.
Word	Upper case indicates loudness.
º º	Degree symbol indicates segments of talk which are markedly quiet or soft.
> <	The combination of "more than" and "less than" symbols indicates that the talk between them is compressed or rushed.
< >	In the reverse order, they indicate that a stretch of talk is markedly slower.
=	An equal sign indicates that no break or delay between the words thereby connected
(( ))	Double parenthesis enclose descriptions of conduct.
(word)	When all or part of an utterance is in parentheses, this indicates uncertainty on the transcriber's part.
( )	Empty parenthesis indicate that something is being said, but the transcriber could not hear it.
(1.2)	Numbers in parenthesis indicate silence in tenths of a second.
(.)	A dot in parenthesis indicates a "micropause"; hearable but not readily measurable, ordinarily less than two tenths of a second.
[	Separate left square brackets, one above the other on two successive lines with utterances by different speakers, indicates a point of overlap onset.
hhh	The letter "h" indicates hearable aspiration.
	The arrow in the margin indicates the lines of the transcript relevant to the point being made in the text.
word	Boldface indicates forms relevant to the point being made in the text.

[1]Taken directly from Ochs & Capps, 2001, pp. xi-xii.